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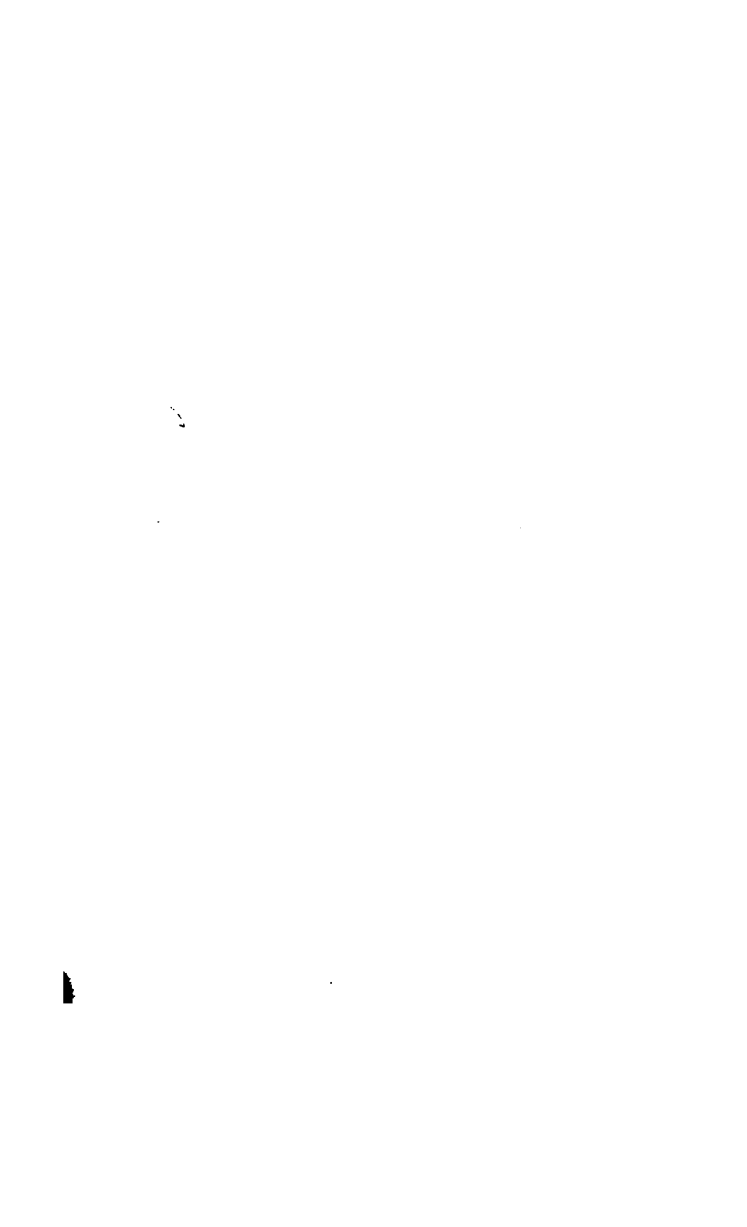
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1. Business correspondence
2. Fiction - Short story
3. Autobiography





7





**The Art of Writing and Speaking
the English Language**

**CONSTRUCTIVE
RHETORIC**

The Art of Writing and Speaking the English Language

By Sherwin Cody.

Vol. I.—**WORD-STUDY** (Spelling, pronunciation, use of the dictionary).

Vol. II.—**GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION** (Simplified system).

Vol. III.—**COMPOSITION** (Franklin's Method).

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Part I. Business Letter Writing; Part II. Short Story Writing; Part III. Creative Composition.

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THE ART *of*
WRITING & SPEAKING
The ENGLISH
LANGUAGE

SHERWIN CODY

CONSTRUCTIVE
RHETORIC

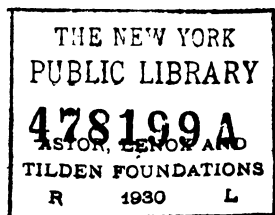
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CONSTRUCTIVE RHETORIC

INTRODUCTION.

The first essential of a successful composition is that it interest the reader. This should be the sole object of all writing. Compositions that fail to interest are failures in every way. They have no practical utility or reason for existence.

Now for the average man or woman the standard textbooks on rhetoric fail in this first, great essential, because they are too theoretical, and theory is the very hardest thing in the world to get any ordinary person interested in. The men who write these textbooks have been from the time of Aristotle men whose lives are devoted to theory, and to teaching theory. They choose as their models of English the great theoretical writers. To them theory is the most naturally interesting subject in the world, and to write in a theoretical vein is to them the highest form of literary art.

Ordinary persons are not interested in theory. They are interested in pictures; they are interested in other men and women they can become acquainted with; they are interested in facts that will be of practical utility to themselves. In other words, to use the language of the theorists, the common reader wants the concrete.

There are three ways of writing an advertisement.

The advertiser may say, "We have the best store in town. Come to our store and you will be treated right. Nobody sells goods as low as we do." This is what might be called the general or theoretical method of advertisement writing.

A wiser advertiser will say, "We are selling 5 cent soap for 1 cent today, black taffeta silk worth \$1.50 a yard for 98 cents," etc. This is the concrete method in its simplest form.

Another advertiser may introduce the story-telling method, give a narrative of how John Jones came to his store and bought furniture for his four-room flat for \$100. It was all good furniture, and he is using it to-day. You may go to such and such a place and see it. His neighbor Henry Smith bought similar furniture at some other place for \$5 less, and he has spent \$50 replacing articles that have already worn out.

Whenever you can give the *human touch*, you grip the reader's interest with hoops of steel, and hold it to the end. The *human touch* is at the very antipodes of theory.

Perhaps the reader will now perceive that the best possible drill for an advertisement writer will be to study story-writing, since there he is most likely to catch the knack of the *human touch*. The newspaper writer will also discover that in a story he will find the best drill on light and sprightly conversation, which will help him to give his narratives of facts the *human touch*; or he will learn what are those nameless little acts of real people which touch the interest and hold the attention of common readers.

In Milwaukee they have had wonderful success in teaching a free use of language to children in the *lowest grades* of the public schools by telling them

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stories which they are asked to retell in their own words. The children get interested in the stories, and the composition hour is no longer a dreaded grind. Rather it is the hour they look forward to all day long.

In high schools and colleges, too, story-writing is beginning to be recognized as a wonderfully effective form of composition drill.

The fact is, a story to be a good story must be realistic, concrete, and interesting. If it does not interest, we quickly find it out, and set it down as a failure. So by using the story as a composition drill we are most sure of maintaining the interest; just as we are most sure of being dry if we choose the theoretical disquisition style of the old fashioned "composition."

Again, the short story is so varied that it brings into use every power a writer has at his command. It is the most comprehensive composition drill that any one can invent.

The best possible language drill is to take a well written short story and rewrite it, book open before you, simply changing the scene, or one or two of the characters.

By trying to write a realistic story for yourself you come to know what are those little human touches that so affect the heart of the common reader, and so you are in a position to introduce them into advertisements, business letters, newspaper articles, or any thing you may write.

No man can write a purely theoretical drill exercise and be interesting; but one can write an actual business letter, on a business topic in which he is interested, and make it valuable even though it is an exercise. And that is what all exercises ought

to be—not mere theoretical compositions, but real, useful things, just as much as is the chair that the student furniture-maker constructs.

In this textbook, business letters are taken as the most practical form for the very short composition; short stories are taken as the most practical form of the composition of average length and the widest possible range; while the third section, that on creative composition, takes into view compositions of book length, but devotes itself largely to practical suggestions of general utility. All sections are equally intended for the study and drill of students of constructive rhetoric. This is a textbook on literary construction in its most practical possible form.

It may be that some will say,

"I do not expect to become a short story writer: why should I waste my time on a book devoted to short story writing?"

Answer: "Because it is the quickest and easiest way to learn to write effective advertisements."

Or another may say,

"I want to be a journalist and write newspaper articles: why should I study business letter writing?"

Answer: "Because the really good business letter is the *summa ultima* of the pithy paragraph, the thing in which you wish to excel."

Still another will say, "I have no ambition to become a creative writer. I do not aspire to fame. Therefore I have no use for a book on 'Creative Composition.'"

"Wrong! You have every use for it. The creative writer is merely he who understands human nature and knows how to appeal powerfully to that common human being, the average reader. You may *never become great and famous as a writer*. Your

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work may lie in other directions. But every time you write a friendly letter, you undertake to apply what little knowledge of human nature you have to amuse or instruct or convince. You use in a small way exactly the means, and you require exactly the powers, that the famous writer requires in a larger way. He devotes a lifetime to gaining his unusual power: you should devote a few hours at least to developing slightly your power of moving human nature by words, for the sake of your private friends if for nothing else. They form your little audience, and in your little way you ought to give them some consideration, just as in a larger way the great writer gives his larger audience, consisting of general readers, a larger and more painstaking development of his powers."

This chapter is a theoretical chapter; but this book is not a theoretical book. The different parts were first written for purely practical purposes; and the theory in this chapter was invented afterwards, to account for the remarkable practical results that came from the use of the practical methods here collected under the general title of "Constructive Rhetoric."

PART I.

BUSINESS LETTER WRITING

Introductory. The writing of business letters is apparently a simple matter, for millions of people are writing them every day. In certain lines of business, however, highly skilled correspondents are sought, and secured by high salaries. More skilled correspondents would be employed if they were to be found, or if business men realized how much business a poor correspondent can turn away. Business letter writing can be learned as certainly as stenography or any recognized business calling, and without doubt the strictly professional letter-writer would be paid according to his ability.

First of all, a business letter should be strictly grammatical. Many business letters are not so; but even the illiterate would soon perceive the difference, and without knowing why, would prefer the business man who seemed by his letters to be master of what he professed.

The simple graces of rhetoric and a trained style would also prove useful, in spite of the limited range which business letter writing seems to have. Every letter-writer often feels that he

would like a freer use of words. This is nothing more or less than the ability which results from cultivating style according to the principles already laid down.

Principles governing the construction of business letters. But full knowledge of words, grammar, and the principles of composition will not alone make a good business letter writer. This branch of composition has features peculiar to itself. The principles which govern it may be stated briefly as follows:

1. *Know the man to whom you write.* No man can write a good business letter unless he understands the person to whom he is writing from top to toe. In most cases he has never seen this person. If he is replying to a letter before him, he can form some idea of the writer from the character of the letter, including the handwriting, if the letter is written by the person who composed it. For the rest, he must judge the person from his general knowledge of the class to which he most probably belongs. In any case, the character of the person to whom the letter is sent, wholly determines the form of the letter, and even what is to be said. Knowledge of the reader is the first requirement of all composition, and it would be well for the writer of fiction, and all other writers, if they realized it as the business letter writer must.

2. *Never write a longer letter than will be read.* It goes without saying that unless a letter is going to be read, it is not worth writing. Coun

try people usually have plenty of time, and like to read long letters; busy city men and women have not the time to read long letters, and simply will not do it. It is folly to write a longer letter than the recipient will read, however important the topic or extensive the subject. If much is to be said and it is important that each point should receive due consideration, a separate letter should be written to cover each important item.

3. *How to Condense.* All letters are necessarily severely limited in length, and the most important principle of composition for letter writers to master is condensation. This may be secured, positively and negatively, in various ways, as follows:

a. By *omitting* all details that the recipient of the letter may reasonably be supposed to know already.

b. By *suggesting* and *implying* in the choice of words and forms of the sentences as much as possible.

c. By stating important matters so *forcibly* that the reader will be forced (or rather induced) to think out the unspoken details for himself. This is the hardest of all to do.

Two Classes of Letters. There are two general classes of business letters, those which give information asked for, and those intended to induce people to buy goods. Usually in replying to specific inquiries there will be an excellent opportunity to throw in a word of persuasion.

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1. *Replies to Questions.* In replying to letters asking for information, a full statement of all the facts is highly desirable. If a person has asked a question, he will be interested to read the reply all through. The general tendency of business men is to shorten such letters unduly. As a rule, such letters should be rather long. It is a mark of courtesy which is appreciated, and the business man never knows when his reputation for courtesy will bring him a big order, or when his reputation for crabbedness or the indifference which brevity indicates will send a highly profitable order to some other firm. Moreover, the man of sound business principles will give as much attention to small inquiries and small orders as to large ones, for there is no telling when the small buyer will become the large buyer; to say nothing of the fact that most fortunes have been made through large numbers of small sales.

2. *Circular Letters.* On the other hand, letters which are designed to stimulate business or secure orders, that is, which are more or less advertising circulars, are very likely to be too long, and so they are not read and only feed the wastebasket. The fault is almost universal, and it is notoriously fatal. The seller is full of his subject, full of arguments. He could talk for an hour, two hours, all day. It is therefore very hard for him to confine himself to a few words judiciously spoken.

We present two or three samples of well written letters taken from actual correspondence.

Letter from a Mail-order House. The first letter which we present was sent out by a large and very successful mail-order house in reply to an inquiry from a countryman who thought of buying a buggy, and in his letter speaks of various other articles.

An Answer to Questions.

Chicago, Jan. 6, 1900.

Dear Sir:

We have received your favor of the 4th inst. stating that you have decided to purchase our No. 42 buggy. We wish to commend your selection. By ordering this buggy of us you will save no less than \$15.00, for it cannot be duplicated elsewhere at \$15.00 above our price.

We note that there are several changes you desire in it, and we are pleased to state that we can make all of these changes and the substitutions you desire without extra charge, except as follows: The price of No. 42 buggy with $\frac{1}{4}$ leather top is \$42.80, according to the catalogue quotation. For leather covered bows there will be an extra charge of \$3.00; for making the dash without the nickled rail, but with a hole in each top corner as shown in No. 60 Peerless, there would be an extra charge of 50c. Dark green cushions trimmed in velour maroon colored velvet to match the gear would be 75c extra.

We repeat the specifications;

No. 42 buggy with $\frac{1}{4}$ leather top, Armstrong single loop springs;

Plano body—22 x 54 or 24 x 54 in.;

Baily body loops;

Thousand-mile axles;

One-inch wheels compressed, hub style;

Rubber step pads;

Four leather covered bows;

Leather covered prop nuts;

Division dark green cushions trimmed in velour maroon velvet to match gear;

Gear painted maroon and striped in some suitable way;

Leather back stays;

Rubber side curtains and storm apron;

Buggy to have shafts, no tongue.

The total price for this buggy according to these specifications is \$47.05, strictly net, free on board cars at Chicago.

We shall not get the buggy ready until we hear from you, because the price is a few dollars more than you thought it would be, and because you omitted to enclose any money. We do not accept orders for C. O. D. shipments unless a sufficient amount is enclosed with the order as a guarantee of transportation charges both ways, and as an evidence of good faith on the part of our customer. As we are making no exception in your case, but treat all of our customers alike, we hope you will order the buggy promptly in the regular way, and understand our position in the matter.

The shipping-weight of this buggy is about 425 lbs. and our Transportation Division will enclose

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with this letter information enabling you to determine what it will cost for freight laid down at your nearest receiving point.

The word "corded" in the description of the buggy has nothing whatever to do with the bows, but refers to the seams in the top lining. You know how a coat looks with corded seams; well, the lining in the top of buggy is made in this way. It makes a nicer finish.

We are glad to know that if this buggy suits you, your mother will want one also.

You are also interested in double Harpoon Hay Fork, and we would refer you to No. 5513 at 68c and No. 5517 at \$1.00 each. These are fully described and quoted in our general catalogue. For wood pumps we refer you to page 100 of our catalogue.

As we are not sure that you have our latest catalogue, we are sending you under separate cover sections C & E, and hope you will be able to make selections that will be entirely satisfactory in every way. All our catalogue prices are strictly net, cash to accompany order, for goods free on board cars at Chicago, unless otherwise specified. We hope that our quotation and information on the buggy will be satisfactory, and that we may be favored with your order in due time. We promise to give the order our very best attention, and look forward with interest to your reply.

Yours truly,
Simpkins, Marshall & Co.

Circular Letters.

Circular Letter from John Wanamaker. Some time ago the author received a letter in imitation typewriting, on stylish notepaper, in a stylish envelope. The imitation of typewriting was so good that few would recognize the difference between the actually typewritten address and the printed body of the letter, did not the great length of the letter suggest at once that it must be printed. The advertising manager who sent out this circular letter would never have dreamed of actually writing with the typewriter so long a letter as this, and he should have known that this fact would be apparent to any shrewd reader. The letter was addressed to a college alumnus, who in all probability would be a very busy person; so in any case it was too long to be read.

Two things should have been kept in view by the writer of this letter: First, the attention of the reader must be secured. This could have been done by a very short, simple letter, worded somewhat as follows: "Dear Sir:—If you wish to get the Century Dictionary at half price and on very easy terms, you will be interested in the enclosed offer to graduates of Amherst College. The offer is so remarkable that we shall reserve a set of this dictionary, cyclopedia and atlas combined in your name until we can hear from you, and beg that you will do us the courtesy of replying promptly to this letter. By mailing the enclosed *postal card* you will receive full information by

return. Very truly yours." Second, it was of course desirable to have full information within easy reach in case there was the faintest glimmer of interest. Once started, the interest might grow through fostering, and perhaps it was well to present an argument on the spot; but this should have been included in a printed circular. Such a circular was enclosed; but the amount of matter given in both letter and circular was excessive. After the postal card asking for further information had been returned, the advertiser might have sent everything he had to offer.

Except for this feature, the letter was admirably written.

Some time afterwards another letter was sent (what is technically known as a "follow up" letter). It supposes that some impression had been made by the first letter. If such was the case, an argument was in place and a long letter was justifiable. Here is the letter, and it is a model of its kind.

A "Follow-up" Letter.

Dear Sir:

Not having heard from you in answer to our letter making you, as an Alumnus of Amherst College, a special offer on The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia and Atlas, we again address you, and as before we enclose a postal card and ask you to return it to us. We address you again for the following reasons:

First—The enormous sale—130,000 sets—con-

vinces us that The Century has come to be recognized as a necessity in every home and office.

Second—The plan of The Century is such a radical improvement on that used in other encyclopedias that it is now conceded to be a distinct advance over all other works of reference and as such is, we should think, worthy of your investigation.

Moreover many graduates of your College have already ordered the work, and their letters testify to its wonderful value. We, therefore, now advise you that we have secured the entire edition of the 1902 issue. This contains the series of handsome colored plates, showing birds, flowers, fishes, precious stones, trees, etc., which have been included in the work for the first time. As you will see from the enclosed sample, they are printed in the same degree of mechanical excellence that characterizes every department of The Century.

This work is used more than all other reference works combined, and if you like we can give you the names of people you know who own and use it, for we sell it on its merits.

We can tell you how professional men use The Century—how they find in it practical information not to be found in their textbooks.

Or we can show you how the business man, limited as to his time, finds in The Century an ever present help, its unique system of arrangement placing all facts at his instant disposal.

Or we can demonstrate that to the man or wom-

CIRCULAR LETTERS

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an whose opportunities for self-culture and advancement are meagre, The Century is the equivalent of a working library of many hundred volumes.

Or we can tell you of the school child, or student, who uses the Century and thus gains an immense advantage over those who do not have access to it.

What we desire is to have you investigate our offer. This does not mean subscribing. All we want is the opportunity of explaining to you by letter what we consider the best book offer ever made.

We forward the complete set on receipt of the initial payment of \$1.00, and the balance may be paid in small, monthly amounts.

As we are still carrying your name on our Century mailing list, we enclose a card which we ask you to use in advising us if we shall cross your name off, or send you a descriptive book of the Century, containing colored plates, maps, and sample pages, with full information of our half-price offer. May we ask the prompt return of the card?

Yours very truly,

John Wanamaker,

New York, Jan. 26, 1903.

Per J.

An Artful Business-bringing Letter. The following letter sent out by a New York publisher is highly artful and skilfully worded. This, too, was a fac-simile of a personal typewritten letter,

filling an entire page. It is much shorter than the letter from Wanamaker's, though it is still too long. It was one in a series of similar letters judiciously calculated to rouse and retain the interest of the recipient, and that fact gave evidence that the writer of the letter appreciated the value of giving one idea at a time, in order not to overburden the reader; but he did not carry his principle quite far enough. The letter should be reduced by one third.

Letter Soliciting Advertising.

New York, Feb. 4, 1902.

Messrs. Fossenden, Scaper & Co.,
Joliet, Ill.

Gentlemen:

As you are fully aware, the circulation of The Home Companion is gained by the arrangements we have perfected with hundreds of small publishers in the smaller towns throughout the United States to club the magazine with their newspaper. The Home Companion has been so remarkably well received by the people in these small communities and rural districts, as to make it impossible for us to fill the demands for our January and February issues, notwithstanding that we printed a quarter of a million copies of each.

In view of this great demand our edition for March and future issues until further notice will be half a million copies, and we and the New York Lithographic Company guarantee that these

copies will properly reach that number of families, the best of the mail buying class.

Let us say now and emphatically that this is not a free distribution. That the magazine is not a supplement to any newspaper. That the magazine is not circulated by department stores or other stores. It is an independent publication issued independently in each of the small towns, and is advertised, specially featured, and in other ways given wide publicity according to the progressiveness of the publisher handling it. Our method of securing circulation is merely the application of the principle that if one man can accomplish certain results, a thousand men properly directed should accomplish a thousand times as much as the first man.

Space in the March issue will cost \$2.00 per line for black advertising, and \$2.50 per line for color advertising. If you are looking for the most effective advertising in the mail order line, advertising that is bringing large returns to the most particular advertisers, this is your opportunity. We specially recommend a color display for those looking for quick returns. Proofs of circulation will be furnished at any and all times. Pro rata reduction in cost of advertising should our circulation not be as claimed. Can you ask for more?

Very truly yours,
The Home Companion Company.

This letter begins, "As you are fully aware." Of course the reader of the letter was not aware; but this is a tactful and effective way of introducing the statement that is to follow, only the writer overdoes the matter by including the word "fully." The word is unnecessary, for "As you are aware" serves every purpose; and as a matter of fact "fully" even spoils the intended effect to some extent by insisting over much, so making the reader suspicious.

The frank statement of how the circulation has been obtained is a most happy stroke. Many publishers would have concealed the facts. This one realizes that the facts are interesting in themselves to the reader and so are likely to win a hearing from him; but, also, confidence is invariably given by frankness.

The weak part of the letter is the second and third paragraphs. They insist a little too much. The reader is interested in the method of securing circulation, which will probably strike him as a clever idea. A very brief statement of the results of this scheme, selected from the most telling sentences of the third paragraph, would be appropriate. The subject-matter of the second paragraph might better have been condensed into the last paragraph, or omitted altogether. The last paragraph might easily be condensed in its wording. The tone of suggestion and recommendation is effective, since it assumes confidence and a friendly feeling; the assumption of such *a feeling* goes far toward producing it.

Handling a Large Correspondence.

But some business man will remark, "I have to dictate over a hundred letters every day; I haven't time to consider every word in every one."

Every correspondent knows that when a hundred letters a day have to be composed, these letters are all very much alike in subject-matter; and very probably the wording is very similar in letter after letter. Usually a large correspondence can be divided into a few classes of letters. Certain statements will have to be repeated over and over and over. In other letters the variations will be slight. Such a correspondence may be mastered in the following way:

Select from your copy-files letters containing the statements that have to be repeated most often, looking on them as typical letters that may be identical with hundreds of others. Study each letter, thinking of its application to as large a class of cases as possible, changing and revising the wording, reflecting on the probable reader, condensing or expanding as the case may require, until the letter is as nearly perfect as you can make it. Lay this one aside, and take up the type letter for another class, revising that in the same thoughtful, careful way. An hour or two may be spent on each letter.

In dictating, have these carefully prepared form letters at hand and shape your actual letter from the form you hold in your hand. Of course some variations will have to be made. At first you will

make as few variations as possible, gradually memorizing the form letters. But as you dictate, you will think of other methods of expression, and these new methods you will introduce into the letter you have under weigh. By making a note of the letter, you can refer to your copy-file and extract the phrase or sentence that pleased you, placing it with your other form letters.

If this method of careful study is pursued for several months, you will be able to dictate a hundred letters a day, and feel sure that they are all as nearly perfect as if you had spent an hour over each. You will soon memorize the forms and can repeat them without referring to your copies; and as you go on, new forms will suggest themselves, and you will use them, until your memory is loaded with a vast variety of special forms, any of which you can introduce on the spur of the moment, and you will have the advantage of having given each phrase or sentence you use the most thorough and searching study. There is no reason in the nature of things why a business letter should not be the most perfect work of art that any literary production is capable of being.

Humor in Business Letters.

The humorous style that is so because it is so preëminently *good-humored* would be a most powerful aid to the business letter writer if he *could* see how to use it. The danger always is *that the serious-minded man to whom one writes*

might not suspect that one was joking, and unpleasant complications might follow.

Deliberate fun is largely barred from business letters, though it is being used more and more in newspaper advertising. But the American business man can fight against the deadly seriousness that seems to have taken such possession of him. Letters need not be written in a tone so fiercely earnest. Of course they should not be flippant or frivolous, since such a tone inevitably destroys confidence; but they may and should be good-humored, kindly, courteous. "Replying to your esteemed favor, which seems to have no date," sounds like an unkind rebuke; for what does the date matter? The mere dating of a letter is too trifling a circumstance to be taken in so serious a way, unless a lawsuit or a charge of public dishonesty is to hinge upon the exact moment at which the letter was written.

In every correspondence, too, many errors of various kinds will arise. Those which are trifling and amusing may always be made the occasion of good-humored jest, which will usually be appreciated, and may prove a powerful means of winning a customer. In the case of more serious errors, remember that argument, dispute, bad temper have ruined many a letter-writer's career; self-control and kindly courtesy will do more to win your point than the most positive proof that you are right.

And once a business man has begun to look

on "the humorous side of things," he will gradually see many opportunities for introducing the humorous style into his letters. Be very sure it will be worth a fortune to any man who can master it for business purposes.

Generosity and Courtesy. Another thing to be remembered is that all men are reflectors, and we get back very much what we send forth: if we send forth humor, good temper, and courtesy, we shall get them back; and, strange as it may seem, if we give generously, others will give to us. "Cast thy bread upon the waters and after many days it will return again" has a wonderful significance for the business man who can appreciate it. The man who makes himself cheap, makes a mistake, of course; but the man who frankly gives, assuming and believing that others will give to him, is usually favored as he expects and wishes to be.

BOOKLET WRITING.

In advertising-booklet writing all the resources of an accomplished literary style may be made available, according to conditions. There are in general three kinds of booklets. The simplest is the booklet that merely describes in detail some article that is for sale, mentioning all the points in its favor: such a booklet is practically a catalogue. Or a booklet may be written to educate the customer to an appreciation of what he would *gain by making* use of the thing advertised. Or

again, a booklet may be planned to entertain and divert, while incidentally holding the attention of the reader upon the advertised object till by unconscious mental effort he comes to think enough about the object to be curious about it, and to want to try it. This is the most difficult type of advertisement writing to accomplish with success, but it is obviously the only one that will be effective in the case of very simple objects which cannot be explained or argued about, but must be tested through the mere personal inclination of the buyer. It requires a high literary skill to produce such an inclination of the mind. It is very much like producing an inclination in the mind of the reader of a work of literature toward some moral or intellectual idea, or producing a liking for a character in a story. This suggests to the business advertisement writer that he should study story-writing and creative composition.

Usually a booklet is sent to some one who replies to a short advertisement, and that fact implies that some interest has been aroused. The simplest form of booklet to meet such a demand is written in a clear, terse style. The booklet writer has the advantage over the writer of a literary work that he may be as brief as he wishes, and the more wit, information, and argument he can crowd into a few pages the better. Sincerity, honesty, is the chief source of success. The old doctrine of P. T. Barnum that the public likes to be humbugged has been entirely exploded.

As a rule, rigid truth, if there is no hesitation or timidity in the writer, will carry conviction much more certainly than exaggeration or falsehood, even if the writer thinks he is concealing his steps perfectly. Somehow the false note always betrays itself.

The truth is, an advertisement or advertising booklet should be valuable and useful to the reader, just as a literary work should be. If it is useful, it will be kept and read; if it is not useful, it will be thrown into the waste-basket. No booklet should ever be sent out that is likely to be thrown into the waste-basket. If the subject itself cannot be made sufficiently interesting, useful information, extracts from literary works, or the like, should be introduced merely that the booklet may be kept. This is exactly the principle of the magazine or newspaper, from the advertiser's point of view: the valuable information or literary works in the periodical carry the advertising into the sight of the reader and keep it there till it has had a chance to sink into his mind, whether consciously or unconsciously. Booklet writers ought to apply the same principle and become distributors of the best there is in literature, art, and science. In this way they will not only diffuse knowledge and help to educate the world, but save millions of dollars worth of advertising literature that is now destroyed as soon as it is received.

PART II

SHORT STORY WRITING

Introductory.

The short story offers the best possible illustration of the general principles of effective *construction* as applied to a whole composition. The possibility of teaching story-writing as a creative art will be considered later. Quite apart from that question, however, the study of the short story may be taken up by those who wish to test and perfect any native talent they may have; but it is also especially recommended to all students of the language as affording the best training in actual composition. Its style is comprehensive of all other styles; its relation to thought about human nature is such that the study of the story gives us a key invaluable in any dealings with our fellows, and suggests the secrets of success even in newspaper and advertisement writing. We have omitted the usual discussion of whole compositions as commonly presented by writers on rhetoric, since it was not apparent that it would have any practical value. Whatever might have been said under that head will be found in this analysis of the short story.

CHAPTER I.

THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF STORIES.

All short stories may be divided into five different classes. They are:

1. Tale, a story of adventure or incident of any sort like the stories of the Arabian Nights or the Decameron; 2. Fable or allegory, a tale with a direct moral, like Hawthorne's short stories; 3. Study, in which there is a descriptive study of some type or character or characteristic, as, for instance, Balzac's "A Passion in the Desert," or Irving's "Sketch Book;" 4. Dramatic Sketch, a story whose value depends on a clever dramatic situation, or a dramatic statement of an idea, like Stockton's "Lady or the Tiger?" Poe's "The Gold-Bug," etc.; 5. Complete Drama like Maupassant's short stories. The complete drama combines all the elements found in other kinds into a single effective story. It tells a tale, it has a moral, though one usually more remote than the allegory; it has a study of character (for the dramatic cannot exist without a character more or less well developed to be dramatic); and it usually suggests some problem of life, or has some clever turn or unexpected episode or climax. Of course it is the hardest thing in the world to combine all these elements into one perfect whole as Maupassant does, but the mere combination itself has powers and produces effects which would *have been* utterly impossible to the various el

KINDS OF STORIES

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ments uncombined. The combination produces a new quality which belongs wholly to itself. So this fifth sort of story is much more than the mere sweeping into one bundle of all the other kinds.

In practical study we should begin with the Tale, because to be able to tell a plain, straightforward story well is the beginning of the very highest art, and the narrative style is verbally at the bottom of all story-telling. The Fable is less important practically, because the moral of a story usually takes care of itself. From the Study we learn the descriptive style, next to the narrative the most important to the story-teller. The Dramatic Sketch may be left out of view until the end of our study, because the dramatic can never be effective until one has mastered narration and description, and then to those who have the dramatic instinct it comes naturally. Such cannot help working toward a climax of some sort, and others will content themselves with the less ambitious tale or study.

We shall always work from the point of view of the Complete Drama, however, for it is the combination of elements toward which we should strive, it is the perfect goal.

CHAPTER II.

OUTLINE OF THE GENERAL METHOD OF
WRITING SHORT STORIES.

Most short stories belong in varying degree to each one of the five classes we have mentioned. If narrative predominates, it is a tale chiefly, though all the other elements of moral, character study, and so forth may be present; if description predominates, you call your story a study. The character of the subject in hand must determine these points. In discussing the typical short story, however, we will take the balanced whole as illustrated by Maupassant's stories, and from this type each writer can make such modifications as his own subject demands.

The course of procedure in setting about the writing of a short story may be as follows:

1. First, one must have a striking idea, situation, or trait of character, and only one. Few people can sit down and evolve a situation out of their heads. They must hit on it accidentally in some way, and it must be very simple, or it will not be completely developed in a short story. The length of a story should be the same as the bigness of the idea, no bigger and no smaller, and to make a story longer or shorter than just as long as the idea is to spoil the story.

2. Having an idea, our author sits down to write his story, and he is very likely to fix his *attention on some general idea in space*. But

that is fatal. He must have something definite to look at. Observe Maupassant in "The Necklace." He begins: "She was one of those pretty and charming girls who are sometimes, as if by a mistake of destiny, born in a family of clerks." Now this story is only eighteen hundred words long, but Maupassant uses up about three hundred at once in describing this woman. He tells how she dressed, what sort of things she had in the house, what she wished she had, what sort of man her husband was, what they had for dinner, her dreams and hopes. You feel well acquainted with her, as if she were your next-door neighbor. And all the rest of the story is about this woman, what happened to her, how she was delighted and disappointed. Her husband is hardly mentioned after the first. It is a story about this woman who has interested you, and everything is left out but her experience.

3. Having a right start, it is not difficult to go straight ahead to the end successfully, in a simple and natural manner. But still it is often puzzling to know what to select and what to reject of the many things that may present themselves to the mind. The invariable rule should be, put in nothing that has not a bearing on the catastrophe of the story, and omit nothing that has. It is a great temptation, if one has a fine moral sentence, an apt phrase, or a terse anecdote or observation, to put it in just where it occurs to the mind. But the artistic story-writer will sacrifice absolutely everything of that sort

to the immediate interest of the story. That is to him everything. But apparently trivial details that are in the thread of the story must be put in. In "The Necklace," Maupassant tells how the wife tore open the letter of invitation, how she looked when she read it, what she said and what her husband answered; then how she went to get the necklace, what her friend said and what she said. But you will notice that he sticks closely to the woman of whom he is telling the story. Everything about her is of interest. Nothing else is.

4. The secret of giving strength to a story is in a clever use of contrasts. A story that has been true to the preceding injunctions will be a correct story, but it will probably be weak unless it has strong contrasts in it, and to make strong contrasts one must match one description against another in each detail. In "The Necklace," notice the skilful contrast in the latter part of the story of what Madame Loisel actually did with what in the first part of the story she wanted to do. She wanted luxuries, servants, a fine house; but they dismissed the servant they had, rented a garret under the roof, etc. Each fact in the last part is matched with a corresponding dream in the first part. Then at the very end of the story, her friend, who is rich, and still remains young, with smooth, white hands, is brought face to face with Madame Loisel, who has grown coarse and rough. This constant and skilful use of contrast and cross contrast makes the real strength of *Maupassant*.

5. But everything should tend to the bringing out of a single idea or particular thought of some kind, without which the story is valueless. The reader expects some pertinent conclusion, and if he does not find it he says the story is a failure, and when he has gotten the essential idea he does not care to read further. He may read on to the end out of curiosity to see if anything more does happen. But if there is nothing more he is disappointed. In the story of "The Necklace" Maupassant does not hint at his real idea until the very end, and when he has said the supposed necklace is paste he stops short. The reader says to himself irresistibly, "Oh, the irony of fate!" and he is ten times more pleased than if Maupassant had said it himself, though no one could doubt he was thinking it all the time he was writing the story.

CHAPTER III.

MATERIAL FOR SHORT STORIES.

The collection of material is the first work of the short story writer, and it is a matter of great importance. Many young writers imagine that they have only to think over their experiences and write a story on almost any idea that may come uppermost in the mind. Nothing could be more erroneous. A short story writer who is going to make a serious success will have to make a business of getting his material, as well as a business of writing his stories.

Odd as it may seem, while a writer should know his subject thoroughly, he should not try to write on a subject that is too familiar. A subject that is fresh to the writer, and has real interest for him, is far more likely to prove fresh and interesting to the reader; for we always write with more zest about that which interests us. So we must not know so much about a subject that our interest in it has evaporated.

But where shall I look for material for a good story? the student will ask.

The best place to look is the files of the daily, weekly, and monthly periodicals. Curious and suggestive things are constantly happening in real life, and some one is sure to report them. An actual incident from real life is by far the best basis for a strong story. It is not enough, for the writer must add his own personality and his art; but it is an excellent beginning.

This is the way in which a great number of the stories of the Decameron were obtained. Boccaccio did not originate a single one, but simply wrote out with skill those he heard at taverns as he journeyed about. The best of these had come, in turn, from real incidents. They were tavern gossip. Yet it took Boccaccio's skill to tell them in such a way that they would live, and without doubt they had received countless alterations and additions in their progress from mouth to mouth. But at the bottom, after all, there was *a little bit* of history.

The next question that arises is, How will you

know what will make a good story? The newspapers are filled with incidents, and we must have some standard for selection.

In the first place, the would-be writer must understand his audience, and know what it would like. A good idea for a story should suggest some new notion, or give a fresh impression. The struggle of humanity is to get out of itself, either for relief or in the struggle to be better or to know more. In order to write a good story, then, it is necessary to be informed concerning what the prospective reader knows and what he does not know, and what he wants to know; for what is old and commonplace to you may be fresh to another, and likewise (do not forget) what is new and fresh to you may be perfectly familiar to many another.

The majority of writers do not truly understand their audience. If successful, it is usually because they have stumbled on something that has happened to prove interesting. While they stick to that one line they are read; if they try some other, they often fail, because they do not really understand the conditions of success. They are indebted to mere luck, not to conscious art.

The simplest idea for a story is a mere narrative of some queer thing that has happened in some other town or neighborhood—in Paris, in China, or “down South,” or “up North.” But there is also the world under our feet and above our heads. Queer things are happening all around us if we have eyes to see them as queer or *interesting events*.

The ideas that one finds under his feet (or, to be literal, let us say in any daily paper we may pick up), do not usually come by mere luck: they are the result of skill and long study, and if a man does get at them he proves himself so much the brighter than his fellows. The truth is, they are in ourselves, and the commonplace incident in the paper merely helps us to fix our thought upon something we have been unconsciously carrying about with us perhaps for years.

If one wishes to write about sentiment, or the secrets of life, that is, stories of human interest, he will find that the most effective ideas for a story are such as determine the entire course of some human life. An idea is good in proportion as it concerns some event that determines a man's happiness or unhappiness. Such ideas are the basis for each of Maupassant's stories. The incident that Maupassant narrates is the one great determining incident in the life of his principal character, and when that has been told there is absolutely nothing more of interest to say about that person. This is clearly seen in "The Necklace," which is the story of the tragedy of Madam Loisel's life. Her life is completely altered by the event of the loss of the necklace.

But the incident is of no value unless it means something. For practical purposes we must select such incidents as we can make use of to illustrate principles of life. We must be able to match *each event* we find in the world with some knowl-

edge of the heart or of human existence which is peculiarly our own, which we have learned from experience. If one has a large stock of experience, it will be easy to find good incidents out of which to make stories; but if one's experience is small, the search must be longer and more disappointing.

If we examine the great short stories of literature we shall find that each throws some faint light on our knowledge of the action of the human heart, or on the mystery of human life, or at any rate makes us think to some purpose on these subjects. Each idea is astonishing, or unexpected in itself, that is, it is new; nevertheless, though we are astonished at the idea, we see how natural it is the moment we comprehend it, and that makes it all the more astonishing.

In a story like that of "Patient Griselda" we have a simple narrative. Probably something resembling the treatment that the Marquis of Saluzzo accorded his wife was a matter of history. But to develop the story the author had to know something of the customs of the people of which he writes, so that the events he narrates would be true to life; then he had to select what commonplace and ordinary details were necessary to make the whole picture complete without burdening it with anything superfluous. And when the story is finished it is of interest because it illustrates what a woman may do, and what motives do, and what motives ought to, govern her. In fact it suggests universal problems, which

even after five hundred years are still interesting. We also note that Griselda is an unusual woman. It is far easier to make a good story about an unusual woman than about an ordinary one.

As a rule, romance is based on possibility. Given such and such circumstances, let such and such events happen. Under such conditions, what would the characters we have chosen do? The conditions assumed may be actual, as in historical romance, so that we cannot tell in reading a story what actually did happen and what is imagined by the writer as a possibility; or the conditions with which we start may be frankly admitted to be imaginary, as in the case of genii of the Arabian Nights, or the absurdities of modern burlesque or comedy. But in any case, granted the existence of genii, or any other thing we may desire to start with, everything else must be developed strictly according to the requirement of nature. There is no letting the imagination run riot, or the whole value of the story is destroyed. The truth, the knowledge of life, is in every case the thing that counts.

A story like Hawthorne's "The Great Stone Face" is an admirable illustration of an historical tale. The existence of the face in the White Mountains of New Hampshire is well known. The nobility of the face, however, is something added by Hawthorne for its dramatic value to the story. There is also no such valley as that *he describes* which is within sight of the real

face. But if we assume a larger range, say a hundred miles, we include the great river valley of the Merrimac, which is filled with a population very similar to that we read of in his story. Such events as those he tells us never did happen, but without doubt Hawthorne found an actual legend about the face that a great man resembling it would come. It was then natural and easy to assume that various persons would claim the honor; and it is also both possible and probable that the great man would turn out to be some such humble person as Ernest. Hawthorne was so familiar with life that he enlarges the *actual facts* by the addition of *possible facts*, and in the resulting story we are unable to distinguish the real from the imaginary.

In all similar stories, the writer should start with as many actual facts as he can find; to these he adds such imaginary facts as he believes to be entirely possible. But when he has finished, the value of his story lies in the great principle of life which it illustrates. This is true just the same, even if the story is merely amusing. The story is amusing usually because the principle of life illustrated is an amusing one; but it interests us because we recognize it as true.

In order always to be true to life, even when using the imagination most freely, it is clear that we must know the life of which we write in a very thorough way. But human life is so wide that one man can know but one variety of it well. His natural bent of mind will determine what

variety. Maupassant's characters in his short stories (the best work he did, for his novels are not considered successful) are very simple folk; there are few details in their lives at best, and they did only one thing of importance, namely, the one thing he tells about. His stories are short because his characters are simple. The more complicated the character the more space it will take to elaborate it, that is, to name all the details it involves. Maupassant's characters, it may be observed, stayed in one place and had but few relations to the outside world. The characters that one can write about successfully are usually such as have mental habits like one's own, though outwardly they may be entirely different; for, instance, if one's own plans and thoughts are on a large scale and far-reaching, one's characters will be of the same order, and the delineation of them will require an amount of space proportioned to their reach. And we see how needful it is for every writer above all things to master his own heart. There is only one person whom we have an unlimited opportunity to observe in all moods, in secret as well as in public, and even in his innermost thoughts and emotions, and that is, one's-self. We ought at least to know all there is to be known about him before we begin to write; and we may reflect that to know one man thoroughly is to know something of the whole human race.

CHAPTER IV.**THE CENTRAL IDEA.**

Short stories are like pearls: at the very centre of a pearl is a grain of sand about which the pearl material gathered. At the very centre of every short story is some passing idea such as almost any one might pick up. It is hard and practical, and alone is not worth very much, though sometimes it is a grain of gold instead of a grain of sand. It is the first thing the writer thinks of, however. He says, "I have an idea for a story." About that idea he develops his pearl of a story.

As example is better than any discussion, we will give in this chapter what seem to us the first ideas on which certain well known stories were based; that is, what the author had in mind when he said to himself, "I have an idea for a story."

First let us refer to two stories in which the central idea is the matter of most importance. "The Last Sentence," by Maxwell Grey, though a novel in bulk, is really only a short story drawn out, and has all the characteristics of a first rate short story. The central idea is that of a judge condemning to death his own son. Such a situation may be developed in many ways. Either the judge may know that he is condemning his son, and do it in the performance of his duty; or he may be ignorant of that fact, and find out

only afterward what turns out to be the tragedy of his life. He may be in ignorance till the sentence is about to be pronounced, when the prisoner may inform him that he is condemning his own son. We may suppose that the judge goes on and pronounces the just sentence; or we may suppose that he breaks down and refuses to pronounce it. In whatever way we view the subject, it is full of intensely dramatic possibilities.

Another excellent story in which the central idea is of the first importance is "An Operation in Money." Albert Webster was impressed with the power a cashier in a bank has, and that the strain upon his honesty is something that justly ought to be paid for. So far the idea is commonplace enough; but when we think that all a cashier has to do is to put a bundle of bank-notes in his pocket when he goes home at night, and that no one will know it till the next morning, and then he could choose to serve the maximum ten years in prison and have the money to enjoy the rest of his life, the situation becomes startling. Here were facts that any one might know; but no one thought of making use of them till Albert Webster discovered their possibilities. With such a basis, all that is needed is skill in plot construction to develop the situation that may be assumed.

From these let us turn to some stories of the present day school, in which the central idea usually is slight. In Kipling's "Story of Muhammad

Din," we have the simplest account of an Indian baby who died. That is material that any one may have in any part of the world, and in itself is absolutely valueless. But in this story Kipling illustrates the fact that even the meanest child may have his dreams and ambitions in life. Hence the polo-ball, and the grand palaces the child traced in the dust. We find almost the same idea on a far grander scale in Kipling's "The Man Who Would Be King," in which two beggars set out to be kings of Kafiristan. But these stories get their strength from the violent contrasts in which they abound—a subject we have already considered.

In Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" we have a story of conscience, based on the idea that a man may so brood over a crime that his mind will imagine everything is betraying him, even the beating of the dead man's heart, and this imaginary betrayal causes the man to betray himself. This story is a study of a psychological possibility, but it is just as real and true as if it were based on fact. The situation presented is the chief thing. Again in "The Gold-Bug" we have a story based on the supposition that the treasure known historically to have been hidden somewhere by Captain Kidd was found by means of a cipher. It requires a powerful creative imagination to work out these possible details so that they cannot be distinguished from historical fact, but evidently the central idea of the story was of essential importance.

In contrast with these tales of Poe's we may place Arthur Morrison's "On the Stairs." The central idea in this story is that everything that passes should occur on the stairs, a condition illustrative of the gossiping habits of the people in the East End of London. But that has no particular importance until we add to it the value which such people place on funeral ceremonies, even above life itself, and the thought that a life might actually be sacrificed through superstition and ignorance. When we comprehend that possibility, all the commonplace surroundings assume startling significance and interest. Here again we have a possibility made to appear like an actual fact. In the development of the story everything is taken from actual life except this single assumption.

The peculiarity of the ideas on which recent writers base their stories is their slightness in their original state as compared with the ample soul which the authors give them and the richness of the dress. Unless the writer has a wealth of material in his own mind and heart, such simple ideas as Kipling, Maupassant, and the others use become flat and absurd. To take a very slight notion and build up a good story on it is the most difficult phase of the art. It is far easier, and in its execution simpler, to take an incident ready-made, like that of the judge condemning his son. Almost any one who thought of the possible power a bank cashier would have if he *simply carried a parcel of bank-notes away with*

him at night, and was willing coolly to face the consequences, could make a story out of it which would at least be readable, provided he did not plaster it with sentiment or bad writing. And it is with stories like these that one ought to begin. But the higher artistic qualities of the slighter plot united with the greater significance should be the goal toward which every writer ought ultimately to aim, if only for the influence upon his simpler work in giving it depth.

CHAPTER V.

THE SOUL OF THE STORY.

In the preceding chapter we have compared a perfect story to a pearl, in which the pearl material gathers about a grain of sand, the central idea of the story. We have seen, also, that the grain of sand, or the central idea, is useless until the moral or principle of life is added to it. We saw how the very slight material of an Indian child playing in the garden and then dying became the basis for a masterly short story when the idea of the child's ambitions in life was added to it. In "The Necklace" the incident illustrates the general principles of the irony of fate. And so if we examine each one of the stories analysed, we shall find that there was a principle of life, a moral, or a *realization* of a general idea or situation or character which was the real reason for the existence of the story.

The second sort of story in our five different

kinds was the Fable, which is a story told expressly to illustrate a moral. In the fables of Aesop the story is told so briefly that there is nothing of value in it except the moral. In the stories of Hawthorne we shall find that each story has a very definite moral purpose; and while the stories are fully developed, the matter of chief importance is the principle illustrated.

Though ordinary dramatic stories do not have a moral which shows itself, still under the surface in every story, however slight and however seemingly frivolous, there is something which corresponds to the moral, and which we shall call *the soul of the story*. The soul in any story is that element which makes the story significant for life, which gives it a bearing on the problems of our existence, and which makes it a creation with a power of playing its own individual part in the world, like a human being. Humorous stories illustrate absurd or ridiculous phases of life, or excite our amusement by their slight exaggeration; but they would not interest us if they did not mean something. Other stories may illustrate purely intellectual phases of character, and have no real *moral*. In any case the moral must not be a lesson, and must not be stated in plain words: rather it is something that each reader must deduce for himself from the story as it is told. He feels it rather than reads it. But it is the divine, the immortal element.

Certainly a story is very likely to live or die *in proportion* to the size of its soul; that is, in

proportion as it is in some way significant of life. It is the soul of the story which makes it sink into the reader's mind and live there, and which makes him go back to a story and read it a second or a third time. He has caught a breath of the infinite, or a glimpse of the meaning of existence which he did not have so clearly before and it gives him life.

If we should go over the great stories of standard writers we should find that every one, without a single exception, has a meaning of its own in regard to life. In Poe's story of "The Gold-Bug," for instance, there is no moral lesson, but there is a most striking intellectual lesson in the way in which Legrand made out the meaning of the cipher and by its aid actually found the treasure. Maupassant's "A Piece of String" contains a curious incident. It is odd that so simple a thing as a piece of string should get a man into such trouble, such dire trouble. But that is not all. How did it get him into trouble? That is of much more vital concern. We see how clearly the author has brought out the thought that the incident of the string was only the excuse of fate for showing the man's real character. He resented the implication against him, just because he knew of his weakness in that direction, and realized that he might have been guilty, though as a matter of fact he was not; and this made him determined to clear himself. He was really condemned to death by his own consciousness of evil, though he tried to believe he was the victim

of an unjust persecution; and such a principle as that has vast significance for us who live lives in the world.

The young writer may ask, How is this to be managed? What is the rule for manufacturing the soul of a story, and putting it within the heart of the incident? Alas, there is no rule, for just here we touch on the vast unknown which separates those who have stories to tell from those who have not, or who are not endowed with this sort of genius. But the soul of the story is born of much thinking about life and its principles, its inner meaning, its significance, whether intellectual, moral, or sentient.

If one does not know something worth knowing about life, something of value or suggestiveness, something new and meaningful, he has no material out of which to create a soul. In order to create soul one must have the soul material within him to begin with.

But if one is deeply and vitally interested in life, he will not care to attempt a story which does not have some meaning. His clever incident, his power of character-drawing, his beautiful style, will all be held subservient to the soul, the significance; and they will all be used to clothe and express the soul, which is a conviction, a feeling, an inward realization, and not a theory or creed or bit of clever information about life. The soul is drawn out of the deep wells of our being, and in the written story it is the *element that gives lasting fame.*

CHAPTER VI.**CHARACTER STUDY.**

The third kind of short story is the Study, which may be a study of almost anything, but we may consider it the study of character. This is then the third element to be considered in the construction of a perfect story. The tale and the fable tell about people and what they do, but a great many different kinds of people might do the things that are described. Indeed, if the characters were wooden sticks they might go through all the motions just the same as if they were highly individualized human beings. But the finer the point of the story, the more it has a soul rather than an obtrusive moral, the more individual must be the study of character. The truth is, it is difficult to imagine a story absolutely without character study in any form, but many stories have a merely conventional character study. In a story having a really original character study, the relation of the character to the soul of the story is usually vital, that is, there could be no soul if there were not a living character to which the soul of the story could be attached in some way, though the soul of the story is a very different thing from the soul of the chief character.

Character study may appear in a story in many ways. It may be through the external peculiarities of the persons involved, as in Barrie's *ma-*

terpiece "How Gavin Birse Put it to Mag Low-nie," where Barrie has sketched a group of peasant faces as clear and characteristic as the portrait-artist's pencil ever drew. Their eccentricities and peculiarities are highly amusing, and not the least so because we recognize them as drawn straight from life.

Again in Kipling's "Muhammad Din" we find a real individual character. He is not merely an Indian baby: he is Muhammad Din—the emphasis on the name makes this clearly apparent. He differs from all other babies in certain characteristics that can hardly be analysed; but this difference helps to make the story different in its interest from all other stories. We come to like, even to love the characters in fiction, and if the characters are such that they would attract us in real life, when we find them in a story we are likely to make them our chief friends.

In Maupassant's stories more clearly than in any others (but the same holds true of all good stories), each tale gives a complete idea of some one character. Each one of his stories is the history of a life drama. The catastrophe turns the life course about so sharply that there can be no doubt whatever in regard to it. Observe how absolutely Madam Loisel's life was changed by the loss of the necklace after the ball, and how, just when she thought she was about to rise, she fell deeper than she had ever been. Again, in "A Piece of String" the simple incident of the *picking up of a piece of string* results in driving the *old man to misery and finally to death.*



CHARACTER STUDY

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Maupassant in each case tells the great and vital event in each life, and lets all other details go. So long as life runs in its natural channels it is not interesting. You cannot know how much power is concealed in it. Nobody knows with what force a cannon-ball is moving until it meets some obstacle. Then there is a crash, and the violence of the crash measures the force of the cannon ball. Nobody knows how much latent power is contained in a human life until that life runs up against an obstacle, and its course is completely changed or all its force destroyed. The life may be surprisingly weak or surprisingly strong. In either case it becomes a striking example, and the crash gives us a chance to study its moving principles. When the crash comes the whole life is laid open and we see its secret springs. That is what interests us in our general study of human nature.

Every perfect story which describes a human drama must have one central character, to which all others are subordinate. There are stories of a family, or of a city, or of a nation, in which the family or city or nation is treated as an individual human being, and to all intents and purposes is a unit. But we may think of the central figure in every story as being a single person, as is usually the case. It is never a group of persons not welded together into a body in some way, and when a group is so welded together, you take the group for the purposes of the story as a body and not as a cluster of individuals.

This statement that there can be but one character in a story may need illustration, for it is not patent at the outset. For instance, in a love story there are two lovers. How is the love story more the story of one lover than the other? the reader may ask. The reply is that in every such case one such personality is much more interesting than the other in the mind of the author, and he always selects this one personality as the centre about which the story is woven. The catastrophe turns the life current of this particular one aside, while the life current of the other goes on undisturbed.

In "The Necklace" there are two characters, the husband and the wife. But the story is all about the wife, for the incident happened to her. There may also be a story about the husband, how he felt, how his life was turned about; but Maupassant found the story of the woman so much more interesting that he told that rather than the story of the man. It would have been a serious artistic mistake to try to tell both in the same short story. In "Patient Griselda" we have Griselda, and also the marquis; but while the life of Griselda is powerfully affected, and is turned, first to great heights of happiness, then to sorrow, and finally to permanent honor and respect, it is clear that the life of the marquis goes on in almost exactly the same channels that it always did. The story is the story of Griselda and not of the marquis, except as he is a force influencing *Griselda*. In the story of the Barmecide

feast in the "Arabian Nights," otherwise called the story of the barber's sixth brother Shacabac, the incident of the feast is the matter of chief interest, but it would count for little if it were not for the character of Shacabac. How few men would have done as he did! and in any other case the story would be a farce. As it is, it results in the permanent elevation of this beggar to a position of honor and trust.

Dickens's story "A Child's Dream of a Star" is clearly the story of the boy, for it is his life that is influenced by the star, and his life alone that holds our attention to the incidents. Were it not for Ernest we should care little for Hawthorne's "The Great Stone Face." To be sure, we have Ernest's mother, and Gathergold, and old Blood-and-Thunder, and the Poet; but they are brought in only for their effect on Ernest, and to show his relations to the world. His life alone was really affected by the great stone face.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SETTING OF A SHORT STORY.

Before beginning to write a story, that is, before putting pen to paper, you must get your incident, your "soul" or moral, and your central character. All these things must be clearly in the mind. The original rough diamond must be cut and polished perfectly preparatory to setting in words. In actual practice one frequently works the story out by writing it, and no method is

better or even nearly so good. But the first draft must be completely thrown aside or recast if the story is to be perfectly set. After much practice a writer will be able to perfect a story in his mind so that the first draft will be sufficiently good. But the young writer will do best to sit down with pen in hand and write anything about the subject that comes into his mind. He should not trouble about setting, but plunge at once into describing with as much simplicity and directness as possible the events he wishes to narrate. Gradually the best form for the story will develop itself, and the story can be given an artistic setting. It is a great mistake to think of the setting first, however. The idea and all the details and events must be developed in the mind if not on paper before a really artistic setting can be given.

But when a story has been perfectly conceived and is all ready to be put into artistic form, the practical suggestions of this chapter may be applied.

The background of a story should always be the last thing to be chosen, but it is the first thing to consider when one comes to actual writing out. A story is much like a painting. Some pictures admit no especial background, as for instance a picture of an interior. Other pictures, portraits for example, demand an artificial background, and this artificial background is so chosen *as best to contrast with and bring out the figure.* In story-writing it appears to be simple portraits

that need least background, for a story is a picture of the interior of a mind, while a painting gives the exterior of the expression.

One of the best examples of artificial setting is found in Maupassant's story entitled in the English translation "Happiness."* The story was told in its first crude form in a diary of Maupassant's entitled "Afloat." Here is the material for the story as we find it there:

THE OLD COUPLE.

Last year the friend who first revealed to me this strangely quaint country, showed me two creatures infinitely more curious.

This is how he first discovered them. Wandering on horseback among these valleys he suddenly came across a prosperous farm: vines, fields, and a farmhouse which looked comfortable though humble.

He entered. He was received by a woman, a peasant, about seventy years old. The husband, seated under a tree, rose and came forward to bow.

"He is deaf," she said.

He was a fine old fellow of eighty, amazingly strong, upright and handsome. They had for servants a laborer and a farm-girl. My friend, a little surprised to meet these singular persons in the midst of a desert, enquired about them. They had been there a long time; they were much respected, and passed for being comfortably off, that is, for peasants.

He came back several times to visit them, and little by little became the confidant of the wife. He brought her papers and books, being surprised to

*For the complete story, see "The Odd Number," Harper & Bros.

find that she had some ideas, or rather remains of ideas, which scarcely seemed those of her class. She was, however, neither well read, intelligent, nor witty, but there seemed to be in the depths of her memory traces of forgotten thoughts, a slumbering recollection of a by-gone education. One day she asked him his name:

"I am the Count de X——," he said.

Moved by the obscure vanity which is lodged deep in all souls, she replied,—

"I, too, am noble."

Then she went on, speaking for certainly the first time in her life of this piece of ancient history, unknown to any one.

"I am the daughter of a colonel. My husband was a non-commissioned officer in my father's regiment. I fell in love with him and we ran away together."

"And you came here?"

"Yes, we hid ourselves."

"And you have never seen your family since?"

"Oh, no! Don't you see, my husband was a deserter."

"You have never written to any one?"

"Oh, no!"

"And you have never heard any one speak of your family, of your father or mother?"

"Oh, no! Mamma was dead."

This woman had preserved a certain childishness, the simplicity of those who throw themselves into love, as if over a precipice.

He asked again:

"You have never told this to any one?"

She answered, "Oh, no! I can say it now, because Maurice is deaf. As long as he could hear I should *not have dared* to mention it. Besides, I have *not* *seen* any one but the peasants since I ran away."

"At least, then, you have been happy."

"Oh, yes, very happy. I have been very happy. I have never regretted anything."

Well, I also had gone last year to visit this woman, this couple, as one goes to gaze at some miraculous relic.

I had contemplated with surprise, sadness, and even a little disgust, this woman who had followed this man, this rustic Adonis, attracted by his hussar uniform, and who had continued to see him, under his peasant rags, with the blue dolman slung over his back, sword at his side, and the high boot with clanking spur.

She had, however, become a peasant herself. In the depths of this wilderness she had become perfectly accustomed to this life without luxuries, without charm, or delicacy of any sort, she had adapted herself to these simple manners. And she loved him still. She had become one of the people, in cap and coarse petticoat. Seated on a straw-bottomed chair at a wooden table she ate a mess of cabbage, potatoes and bacon from an earthenware plate. She slept on a straw mattress beside him.

She had never thought of anything but him! She had regretted neither ornaments, silks, nor elegance, nor soft chairs, nor the perfumed warmth of well-curtained rooms, nor repose in a comfortable bed. She had never needed anything but him! As long as he was there, she had wanted nothing else!

She was quite young when she abandoned life, the world, and those who had brought her up and loved her. Alone with him she had come to this savage ravine. And he had been everything to her, everything that could be longed for, dreamt of, expected, ceaselessly hoped for. He had filled her life with happiness

from one end to another. She could not have been happier.

A story like this is not a study of a single character, a portrait, but a presentation of a little scene, showing the couple in Corsica happy because of love alone, and a background is absolutely necessary. Maupassant opens with a description of a scene which is a perfect contrast to the scene in the story. The story is dark, therefore he chooses a light, bright scene—a villa and fashionable people, surrounded with everything the world affords. He immediately touches on the common link, the common note of color if it were a painting: he mentions *love*, which is of interest to rich and poor alike. In this case his setting describes people like those of his audience, the people who will read the story; and his mention of love at the very start indicates clearly in just what direction the interest of the tale will lie. Next the scene of his story is introduced with the utmost skill and grace: Corsica looming above the sea in the distance; and this strange apparition suggests the story, which is then told in the simplest possible narrative form, the events being described in the order in which they happened to the teller.

Here is his introduction as he wrote it:

HAPPINESS.

It was tea-time before the appearance of the lamps. The villa commanded the sea; the sun, which had *disappeared*, had left the sky all rosy from his passing—

rubbed, as it were, with gold-dust; and the Mediterranean, without a ripple, without a shudder, smooth, still shining under the dying day, seemed like a huge polished metal plate.

Far off to the right the jagged mountains outlined their black profile on the paled purple of the west.

We talked of love, we discussed that old subject, we said again the things which we had said already very often. The sweet melancholy of the twilight made our words slower, caused a tenderness to waver in our souls; and that word, "love," which came back ceaselessly, now pronounced by a strong man's voice, now uttered by the frail-toned voice of a woman, seemed to fill the little salon, to flutter there like a bird, to hover there like a spirit.

Can one remain in love for several years in succession?

"Yes," maintained some.

"No," affirmed others.

We distinguished cases, we established limitations, we cited examples; and all, men and women, filled with rising and troubled memories, which they could not quote, and which mounted to their lips, seemed moved, and talked of that common, that sovereign thing, the tender and mysterious union of two beings, with a profound emotion and an ardent interest.

But all of a sudden some one, whose eyes had been fixed upon the distance, cried out:

"Oh! look down there; what is it?"

On the sea at the bottom of the horizon, loomed up a mass, gray, enormous and confused.

The women had risen from their seats, and without understanding, looked at this surprising thing which they had never seen before.

Some one said:

"It is Corsica! You see it so two or three times a year, in certain exceptional conditions of the atmosphere, when the air is perfectly clear, and it is not concealed by those mists of sea-fog which always veil the distances."

We distinguished vaguely the mountain ridges, we thought we recognized the snow on their summits. And every one remained surprised, troubled, almost terrified by this sudden apparition of a world, by this phantom risen from the sea. It may be that those who, like Columbus, went away across undiscovered oceans had such strange visions as this.

Then said an old gentleman who had not yet spoken:

"See here: I knew in that island which raised itself before us, as if in person to answer what we said, and to recall to me a singular memory—I knew, I say, an admirable case of love which was true, of love which, improbably enough, was happy.

"Here it is—

At the end of his story the author comes back to his beginning. He started with love, he ends with love. The general rule is to start out with a statement of the idea which impresses you most, and end with this idea.

We have said a story is like a painting. When one first conceives a story, events and incidents are the chief thing in the mind; but when the story is written, the description looms up and fills the eye almost completely. A mere narrative without description (that is, setting) is like an outline charcoal head. The finished portrait *presents the living subject to the mind. It is alive*

in color, action, and personality. Description is word painting. If one understands the art of painting with pigments, he ought easily to understand the art of painting with words.* When one paints a picture of a woman's face, for instance, he does not begin with details, he catches the pose, the action, the outline. The modelling of the face must be seen and done first in masses of light and shade. No sooner are these laid in than degrees of light and shade develop. The details work out in their true relations of importance. By beginning with the largest, the heaviest, the most important, simplicity and effectiveness are secured. In "The Necklace" observe how Maupassant paints a woman's character in words. He begins with the most striking fact of observation, the element which would strike you first if you saw the actual woman: "She was one of those pretty and charming girls who are sometimes, as if by a mistake of destiny, born in a family of clerks." He fixes her station in life, and this usually determines a multitude of facts. The remainder of the first paragraph is devoted to an elaboration of the idea. The next paragraph begins, "She dressed plainly because she could not dress well, but she was as unhappy as though she had really fallen from her proper station." This sentence strikes the keynote of the story. The student will notice that the first paragraph determines the general

*The best examples of descriptive word-painting are to be found in Ruskin, especially in his "Modern Painters" and "Stones of Venice."

character of the situation, the second strikes the keynote.

A story is like a scene of a play in a theatre, but the writer must put in the scenery as well as the actors, always remembering that a story is the description of the interior of a heart, not so much the exterior, and in this it differs from the painted scenery of a theatre. But before one makes his actors act in a story, he must give a vivid impression of the place, surroundings, dress, and general manner of his characters, whether from the interior point of view or the exterior—it may be either as occasion demands. But a story is sure to be a failure without this picture in some form or other. Sometimes it is woven in with the narrative, sometimes placed at or near the beginning. But it must be somewhere. The young writer finds it naturally existing in his own imagination and fancies it must exist also in the mind of the reader. But this is seldom the case. One should take account of the stock of material he has on hand, and put down something in the written story to correspond to every detail of the picture in his own mind. A well known author once said to the writer that an unwritten story was like a quart of molasses in a measure, which when turned out stuck to the sides and so yielded but a pint. The young writer imagines a good story, but when he has written it out the story is not more than half so *good as he fancied*, and he wonders what is the *matter*. The truth is, half of it remains still in

the mind: he has not put on paper all that he thought, or felt, or imagined, which went to make up the story as he conceived it.

The opposite fault of putting into a story description which is unnecessary is almost as fatal. This unnecessary description comes from the author's fancying that there ought to be description of some kind, and not knowing what description to choose he describes anything and everything that comes into his mind. What is really needed is description nicely calculated to produce a given effect, as with the scenery or costume of a theatre. Some scenery and some costumes are used simply because there must be scenery and there must be costume; but an effective play has scenery and costume which directly aid in the development of the motive. The case is much the same with short story writing: the best description is that which is chosen with direct reference to the motive of the tale.

But how shall one choose? That is the hard question, of course, and can only be answered by experiment. Would you know what will prove effective? First, observe what has proved effective in the best models, and then try a story of your own. When it is finished read it to a friend. If you keep your wits about you sufficiently you can easily tell from his expression of face or your own consciousness whether a passage is good or bad, effective or weak. If it is weak, all you can do is to throw it out bodily and write another. But the young writer must remember that the

test of a story is its power to hold the interest of some particular real person.

EXERCISES IN SHORT STORY WRITING.

The best method of studying the short story is to reconstruct a series of masterpieces, for example such as are contained in "The World's Greatest Short Stories." I. Condense the stories of "Aladdin" and also "Patient Griselda" to 1,500 words each by selecting sentences and paragraphs from the original: only the most effective incidents should be used, and the fewest possible of those. II. Adapt three or four pages of "A Passion in the Desert" to a Rocky Mountain scene—forest instead of desert. III. Adapt the description of Rip Van Winkle at home to a descendant of his supposed to be living now in your own town. IV. Rewrite Dickens's story "A Child's Dream of a Star," making the chief character a little girl. V. Condense Poe's "Gold-Bug" to 1,500 words, changing the wording as little as possible and omitting the study of the cipher, and then adapt it to finding treasure near your own town. VI. Condense Hawthorne's "The Great Stone Face" to 1,500 words and then adapt it to the figure of a pine tree on the top of a distant hill, which assumes a likeness to the profile of George Washington. VII. After adapting the remainder of the stories in the volume in a similar way, try to find outside fresh material for stories as nearly like any one of these as *possible, and work up that material with the masterpiece before you as a model.*

PART III

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CREATIVE COMPOSITION

Introductory.

As this work is intended for the ordinary person, who makes no pretense at genius, it may seem unnecessary to discuss "creative" writing. Many may doubt the feasibility of teaching creative composition at all, since it is indisputably so much a matter of genius; and it will be regarded by the common reader as quite beyond his modest ambition.

The fact is, however, that genius and common human nature are not essentially different. The genius has a little more of one quality and a little less of some other, but only so far as his mind works in the same way as the mind of the reader does the reader account him a genius. We are all, or ought all to be, readers, and the reader has been described as recreating the work of the great author, sympathetically following in his footsteps. The genius indeed leads the way; but the reader who follows and reproduces in his own mind is indispensable to the existence of literature. The fact is, readers taken as a body do more determine the character of a literature than all the geniuses put together. Therefore we ought to study the principles of crea-

tive art so that we may become good readers. Ordinarily the reader re-creates by instinct, paying little attention to rules and principles of construction. But analysis compels thought, forces the acquirement of greater skill, and by its reaction on the mind greatly increases its powers.

We ought to study creative writing, moreover, because, though humble, we too are constantly called upon to write—letters, if nothing else; and by the study of that which is above us we may catch some sparks of the divine which will illumine and elevate the humble compositions which we produce. The great and the small are not at all different in substance, only in size; and it should be our pride to make our little as perfect as the greatest genius makes his much.

Again, some of us may wish to write for the press. Perhaps we have talent; more probably we have not. If we have not, this study will help us to find it out. Knowledge of our lack of ability is just as important as knowledge of our ability—indeed it is more so, for it will save fruitless expenditure of time and energy, and enable us to do something that will be really worth doing.

If we have talent, and are determined to cultivate it, then above all is it important that we should undergo a severe course of training and instruction. Maupassant, the most perfectly artistic writer of short stories we know, studied seven years with Flaubert before he began to print at all, with the result of a very obvious skill. The best short story writers in London today are the young men Mr. W. E. Henley discovered and trained when he was editor of the *National Observer*. Miss Wilkins will probably not deny that for several years she submitted to rigorous

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criticism by Mr. Alden, the editor of *Harper's Magazine*. And many of the greatest writers, if they have not had personal instructors, have been obliged to put themselves through a long and arduous system of training. Balzac was never a natural writer. When he submitted his first play for the criticism of his father's friends, a competent critic told him he should adopt any profession but literature. But he persisted, setting himself to the work of self-training. He wrote over forty volumes of fiction during the next ten years, and not until he was twenty-eight did he feel willing to publish a book over his own name. To go back to Greek history, we are told that Demosthenes was born with none of the usual natural gifts, and never had them. When he tried to be humorous, he raised the laugh only against himself. He had no lightness of style, no power of characterization; and, besides, he was a stutterer. He learned to speak plainly by putting pebbles in his mouth, and submitted himself to almost torturous exercises. He is said to have copied the speeches out of the writings of Thucydides not less than ten times, in order to gain a command of language. Says Longinus: "Demosthenes has no touches of character, none of the versatility, fluency, or declamatory skill of Hyperides. He is, in fact, almost destitute of all those excellencies which I have just enumerated. But by the noble qualities which he does possess he remains supreme above all rivals, and throws a cloud over his failings, silencing by his thunders and blinding by his lightnings the orators of all ages."

When the Greeks wanted to become writers they invariably went to personal masters. There were those who said in those days, Genius is the thing! the art of writing cannot be taught. In opening his textbook

"On the Sublime," Longinus says: "Some hold generally that there is mere delusion in attempting to reduce such subjects to technical rules. 'The Sublime,' they tell us, 'is born in a man, and not to be secured by instruction; genius is the only master who can teach it. The vigorous products of nature' (such is their view) 'are weakened and in every respect debased when robbed of their flesh and blood by frigid technicalities'." But Longinus conclusively answers the objection. "In her most passionate moods," says he, "Nature, while detesting all appearance of restraint, does not show herself utterly wayward and reckless. The vital spark always comes from nature, yet to determine the right degree and the right moment, and to contribute the precision of practice and experience is the peculiar province of scientific method. The great passions, left to their own blind and rash impulses without the control of reason, are in the same danger as a ship let drive at random without ballast. Genius is undoubtedly the greatest blessing we can have, in writing as well as in every other walk of life; but almost equal in importance is it to be well advised, to be a conscious master of art. And above all, a writer can learn only from art when he is to abandon himself to the direction of his genius."

One of the most practical arguments for training over mere natural talent is the fact that the educated genius has been able to repeat his successes *ad libitum*, while mere natural gifts have often failed after the first effort. Mrs. Stowe wrote "Uncle Tom's Cabin" as it were by accident, and it was perhaps the most popular single book of the century; but her other stories, some of them equally ambitious, are wholly unknown, and never had any vogue. On the other hand, Maupassant, after his seven years' training,

wrote one short story that made his fame immediately, and from that time for twelve years he was able to turn out two volumes a year, each succeeding volume even more successful than its predecessors. Balzac, after failing for twelve years—or rather training for twelve years—produced ninety works in the next twenty years.

When his first work on the art of story-writing was published some years ago, the author of this book was accused of wishing to “set up a factory for creating novelists.” Nothing was farther from his thought, and the more thoughtful critics discovered that if all the directions given should be followed out strictly, the enormous work involved would be enough to make a good writer out of almost any one.

The fact is, if the untrained and half-trained writers whose works now burden the printing presses of the country in so frightful a way, could be forced by law or custom to submit to such a rigorous training as the law requires of doctors and lawyers, no spark of genius would be snuffed out, real genius would shine all the brighter, and the mental and moral health of the people would be improved one thousand per cent.

The principles of creative composition are not easily discovered, and any effort to teach them must be imperfect in the extreme. The chapters that follow profess to be nothing more than fragmentary remarks, which it is hoped the readers of this book may find useful.

Since fiction is the form of creative art which interests nine tenths of our literary students, the suggestions here offered have been applied more specifically to story-writing; but the writer of any other form of prose composition will easily be able to adapt all gen-

eral principles to the particular form of composition in which he is personally interested.

The author has ventured in one or two chapters to offer some simple advice based on common sense and experience—advice directed specifically to the young and ambitious author who wishes to get into print; but it is believed that the remarks will be found to be of more or less universal application, and will prove suggestive even to mere readers and students who have no ambition to appear in type. It will be perceived that the general drift of the remarks is to the effect that it is best to keep out of print as long as possible.

CHAPTER I.

VERSE-WRITING.

Verse-writing seems to be the first literary form that savage peoples perfect, and an eminent critic has even maintained that only barbarians can write good poetry (allowance must be made for the "rhetoric" of this statement). Likewise the best poetry is commonly written in youth when the blood is warm and the emotions intense. Many great writers, even prose writers, have begun with verse, and it affords a most excellent literary training. In fact prose cannot be written with entire success till the mind reaches a certain maturity. Nearly all the accomplished prose writers, such as Thackeray, Addison, Bacon, Lamb, attained their marked success only when past middle life. On the other hand poets like *Shelley*, *Byron*, and *Keats* died at an age before

that at which the prose writers had accomplished anything at all. Such writers as Dickens, who published "Pickwick" at twenty-four, and Ruskin who published the first volume of "Modern Painters" at the same age, wrote prose of an extremely lyrical type, that was closely akin to poetry.

So probably the best thing a young writer can do is to try to be a poet; for even if he doesn't succeed it will prepare him to be a prose writer later in life. Overcoming the mechanical difficulties of verse affords a thorough literary training in itself.

The mechanics of verse are really much more simple than books on prosody would seem to indicate. Verse is exactly the same, as far as meter is concerned, as music (that is the time element in music). A foot, consisting of one to six syllables, is practically the same as a bar in music: exactly the same amount of time must be given to every foot, just as exactly the same amount of time must be given to each bar in a piece of music. One syllable in each foot is accented, that is, it is longer than the rest; and so in a bar of music one note is usually longer than the rest and receives therefore a sort of accent.

In English verse there are practically only four kinds of simple feet, namely:

Iambic, the foot consisting of one short or un-

accented syllable followed by one long or accented, as in

The splen'|dor falls'|on cas'|tle walls'.

Trochaic, the foot consisting of one long or accented syllable followed by one short, as in

Once' up|on' a|mid'night|drea'ry,|as' I|pon'dered
weak' and|wea'ry.

Dactylic, the foot consisting of one long or accented syllable followed by two short or unaccented, as in

This' is the|for'est pri|me'val; but|where' are the
hearts' that be|neath' it

Leaped' like the|roe', when he|hears' in the
wood'land the|voice' of the|hunts'man?

Anapestic, the foot consisting of two short or unaccented syllables followed by one long or accented, as in

At the close'|of the day'|when the ham'|let is
still'.

Practically there are many variations and substitutions in verse as it is written, for the actual number of syllables in any foot depends on the time required to utter them, and the time required as pauses for punctuation marks or the ends of lines may take the place of entire syllables. All these variations may be represented by the time notation of music, as in the following line from Tennyson, which may be represented according to the way we read it either as



Break, break, break, On thy cold grey stones, O sea!

OR



Break, break, break, On thy cold grey stones, O sea!

Poetry is also divided into lines, two feet making a *dimeter* line, three feet a *trimeter*, four feet a *tetrameter*, five feet a *pentameter*, six feet a *hexameter*. *Blank verse* is iambic pentameter.

A mastery of the mechanics of verse requires a long and thorough training of the ear in the elements of time and melody.

The Literary Side of Verse. The choice and arrangement of words in poetry is a subject that cannot be analysed successfully. Attention to rules is worse than useless. The essential element is intensity and sincerity of emotion. No good verse can be written without both these; and these, united with literary energy in the study of the masters of poetry, will make a successful poet if anything will. One of the best books for a student of poetry to possess and study is Palgrave's "Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics." The simplest poets to study for unpretentious melody are Longfellow and Burns; for variety and mastery of technic, Tennyson and

Milton (earlier lyric poems); for perfection of style, Keats; for airy imagination, Shelley; for narrative poetry, Byron and Mrs. Browning. Such poets as Robert Browning and Wordsworth are to be studied more for their thought than for their form, since the form is often more or less complicated and imperfect according as the thought is high and inspiring.

CHAPTER II.

ESSAY-WRITING.

Under the head of "essay-writing" we may consider miscellaneous magazine and newspaper writing which has a distinctive literary flavor. Compilations, scientific treatises, etc., usually lack what we may term "the creative element." Their construction is mechanical in a large degree, and while they are useful*, they cannot be called "literary."

If a newspaper or magazine writer has a fair command of language, his work will pass criticism provided he has anything really valuable or interesting to say. The subject-matter alone is considered, and the style must merely be free from errors and objectionable characteristics. Of such writers are composed the "mob of gentlemen who write with ease."

But the literary artist is not content to be mere-

*See "Writing as a Business," a volume now (1908) in preparation.

ly one of the "mob." He wishes to give his writing "distinction:" how shall he do it?

The essay is as nearly devoid of "construction" as any form of writing can be. Any arrangement of the subject-matter is permissible which is logical and suited to the intelligence of the reader. All the suggestions in the following pages for the study of the reader and his needs apply as much to the essay as to the story or drama, but the essay need not confine itself to one subject, nor proceed according to any definite logical scheme such as the orator must use in debate. Nothing could be more discursive than some of the greatest essays, such as those of De Quincey.

The one quality which enables an essay-writer to make his work distinctive is technical "style"—artistic texture—use of language. While a story-writer may attain success by a clever plot, or by clever character study, and does not need to make so prolonged a study of the great masters of style, the general (or essay) writer must master style if he is really to be successful at all. For this there is no better way than Franklin's method of imitating the great writers and masters of language. Moreover, study and practice must be prolonged for a considerable time, and should be accompanied with extensive reading of standard literature.

The greatest fault of the general writer is dullness. While at times he is interesting because his subject is interesting, and at other times his enthusiasm makes him eloquent, still he will often

have to write about things that are not very interesting, and there will be times when his enthusiasm is low. At such times he will inevitably fall into the commonplace, or his style will become turgid through the effort that he makes to avoid dullness. How can a writer always be readable?

Perhaps the writer of our own time who always succeeds in being interesting, whatever his subject and whatever his moods, is Mr. Andrew Lang. And the secret of his success appears to be that he has mastered "the art of humor." It may be a surprise to some to learn that humor is an art; but in the case of the general writer it certainly is. It can be cultivated, mastered, and practised; and since it is a compound, we must seek it in its elements one at a time. In addition to a natural sense of the absurd or incongruous, the kind of humor we have in mind finds its roots in a broad human sympathy, an intelligent understanding of the average man, and a willingness to adapt one's-self to the whims and humors of that average man. It is cheerful, and tries to be lively; it never gets angry or gloomy; it does not even maintain its serious moods too long at a time, nor does it have too high a regard for consistency.

Always to be all these things undoubtedly requires a great and constant effort. Artistic writing never can be a pastime in itself, even though it is devoted to affording amusement to others. *Indeed, creative writing of any kind is one of the*

most exhausting labors man can undertake. Even a brilliant genius, with all his brilliancy, accomplishes nothing unless he labors. But to be light and genial while laboring with such intensity is indeed a great accomplishment.

Next in value to the style pervaded by humor, is the terse and epigrammatic style. The French writer depends on the terse and epigrammatic in the same habitual way that the English writer depends on humor. As the younger American and English writers have felt strongly of late the influence of the great French masters of style, such as Flaubert, Daudet, Gautier, and Maupassant, this style is coming to be far commoner in English writing in modern times than it was in our older literature. This is the only style that enables a writer to be entirely effective in a very short space. The style of humor is naturally expansive, and in very short compositions it often fails of its effect. This no doubt explains the diffuseness of much of the best writing of the first half of the nineteenth century. This is a fault that modern practice is happily correcting.

The chief fault of the condensed, epigrammatic style is that if prolonged it quickly wearies. Some short novels have been written in this style, but their vogue did not last long. In Victor Hugo's "Les Misérables" we see the epigrammatic style happily combined with the sympathetic and diffusive. Probably in no other way than by such a combination could so long a novel have been made so popular. But la-

ter writers have combined the two elements of the terse and the humorous in compositions of magazine length, and with the best results.

Too often the general writer in seeking to get out of his commonplace style, cultivates mannerisms, which perhaps for the moment will attract public attention, but which in the end may be fatal to literary accomplishment and success. These mannerisms are usually acquired by imitating some one writer until the peculiarity is caught. Then if the writer finds that a certain method brings him notoriety, he proceeds to exaggerate it, developing it to the exclusion of everything else. Perhaps he deceives himself into thinking that he has acquired a "distinctive style." The fact is, the writer who has only one style is pretty sure to end by having a bad one. If, however, he learns one style, and then another (it is necessary to learn one at a time), the second is pretty certain to correct the faults of the first, and the danger we have spoken of is avoided. The ideal is to have a mastery of many styles, choosing for each subject the style best suited to it.

These remarks apply especially to descriptive magazine writing, critical magazine writing, newspaper editorial writing, and newspaper book reviewing. As commonly done in newspapers and magazines today, all these kinds of writing are unnecessarily dull. The writer's qualification for his work is his special knowledge of his subject, *or his general good judgment*. Of course both

knowledge and good judgment must come before style; but for the highest success, style must be added. There are, however, various ways in which each of these kinds of writing may be made more interesting.

The best way to make book reviews readable is to quote in them good things from the book reviewed. The art of quotation is by no means an easy one, for the interest of a review depends altogether on how the quotations are made. Above all, the passages quoted must not be "specimens" or detached fragments. The review should read like a story, and the quotations should form an essential part of a continuous train of thought. The most successful modern practitioner of the art of quotation has been T. P. O'Connor, whose page reviews in the London "Weekly Sun" were at one time a striking feature. He simply used the skill of the writer of the book to furnish him with brilliant passages which he made part and portion of his own account of the book itself. This was something his imitators have never succeeded in doing.

In newspaper editorials and magazine critical articles, the anecdote is one of the best means of enlivenment. It is in effect a very short story, and to tell an anecdote well requires some knowledge of short story writing. The writer of such articles will be well repaid for making a distinct and painstaking study of story-writing for this special purpose. Moreover, the introduction of a few words of dialogue is always a pleasant relief.

to the reader. An editorial writer who can master the terse style (the most important for his purposes), the humorous style, and the anecdote, will surely attain a distinction that will raise him above the "mob."

The descriptive magazine article is one of the most difficult to make really interesting. Its value usually depends on its pictorial illustrations. The best means of lifting it out of the slough of the commonplace is to infuse into it something of the sentiment of places and personalities; in other words to reproduce the atmosphere of the thing described, or if it has no atmosphere that you know of to create one for it. We see this done to perfection for common places and common things in Ike Marvel's "Dream Life." But often the subject is real and has an atmosphere of its own; and the first effort of the writer should be to discover it sympathetically as a part of the material to be used.

Necessarily what has here been suggested has been no more than hinted at. Each student for himself should pick out the suggestion that especially applies to his case, and carry it into effect by systematic study and effort. The amount of work that an artist must do is unlimited.

CHAPTER III.

NOVEL-WRITING.

The essential difference between the novel and the short story is that the short story is a single incident affecting the life of a single character; while the novel is a series of incidents or descriptive pictures, introducing a number of persons who act upon each other. This "collision" of character forces in the novel is even more perfectly developed in the drama and makes what we call "plot."

Incidentally, the short story is an effort at condensation, the novel at expansion. A short story is like a cathedral viewed from a distant hill: the cathedral looks small in the perspective, and the outline and the general effect are the matters of chief importance. A novel, on the other hand, is like a cathedral viewed from the interior, where everything is large and spreading above us, and our interest is taken up chiefly with details. A short story describes an incident of history or of life, and the more different it is from the common experiences of the writer the better: for example peasant life, sailor life, thieves' life—any life with which the writer and his readers would not be willing to identify themselves but in which they can take a curious interest. A novel is more often in the nature of a confession, revealing the heart of the author. At any rate in the novel the writer must sympathize with his characters, while

in a short story it is not necessary, the only requirement being that the incident and characters be striking and intellectually stimulating to the curiosity.

Novel-writing is no such definite art as short story writing has become. Its range seems to be wider than that of any other form of literature, and it combines many of the elements of the drama, the epic poem, and the prose essay, and may even introduce the lyric poem in what is called "prose poetry" or "impassioned prose." The proportions of each element, or the presence or absence of any one of them, has not yet been determined. It would seem that any man or woman with a good command of free and native English, a heart overflowing with sympathy and mind filled to the brim with thoughts about human nature, has only to sit down and write a novel without any thought of the form. Form is being studied, however, and is much more an essential element to-day than in the time of Scott or Thackeray; and no doubt in time the novel will become as definite a form of art as any other.*

The one thing that especially distinguishes the great novelists is that they have been creators of characters who become in time as real to us as historic characters; and it would seem that a novel is remembered in proportion to the great-

*For a review of the art of novel writing as it has been so far developed, see "A Study of Prose Fiction" by Bliss Perry, and "Poe's Best Poems and Essays."

ness and permanent human interest of its characters. It therefore follows that no writer can be a successful novelist in whom sympathy with humanity does not exceed intellectual or scientific curiosity. Bacon, Macaulay, De Quincey, Matthew Arnold, Huxley, or Spencer, could not have succeeded as novelists, great writers though they were, because the intellectual, critical, scientific side, of their minds predominated over the emotional and sympathetic. Passionate love is the novelist's key to the Temple of Fame; or if not passionate love, then tender liking and perfect sympathy with the men and women he would portray, especially sympathy with their struggles, their successes, and their failures. Of course, if that love is mastered, and tempered with wisdom and sound judgment, so much the better. Add to love and good judgment an easy and effective style, acquired by a long and wide study of the best models of prose and poetry, and there you have a novelist. With such an equipment, there is little need to study a book on novel-writing. Without it, the book on novel-writing will certainly fail to make a novel-writer. So long as novel-writing is so broad and indeterminate an art, the best one can do is to study literature and literary construction and composition in their broadest phases.

CHAPTER IV.

PLOT CONSTRUCTION.

The Drama.

We have seen something of the method of constructing the plots of short stories. Novels do not have as perfect plots as either short stories or plays, largely, perhaps, because the art of novel-writing is still somewhat imperfectly developed, but also because the way in which novels are read does not necessitate so well shaped a plot.

The essential element of plot-construction is that the interest should increase steadily from the beginning to the end. A good plot is a perfect illustration of climax, and the principle of climax as against anti-climax is an important principle of all writing, from the sentence to a complete novel or play.

The climax of a plot has two phases, the climax proper and the catastrophe. The climax proper is the point of greatest intensity of interest, a little after the middle, when the motives of the characters are revealed; the catastrophe is the crash of material elements resulting from the motives that have been revealed. The so called climax proper is largely theoretical, and the ordinary reader does not make any special note of it. In theory the emotional strain is relaxed, and the excitement tapers off to the end, so that we *should be left in about the condition that the*

beginning of the reading found us. In practice the catastrophe is the only climax that is recognized, and the descent to earth is very easily accomplished in the few scenes that follow the revelation of the dramatic climax or catastrophe.

There are two recognized methods of plot-construction. One consists in concealing the nature of the catastrophe until the end. It is the method of all detective stories and mystery novels and plays. This method furnishes an easy plan for maintaining the interest, it is simple, and it is widely practised. The method of revealing the catastrophe in general terms at the beginning throws on the characters and the details of the development the whole burden of keeping the reader interested. It is the method of all great artistic writing, and is well exemplified in Shakespeare's tragedies and most of his comedies.

Poe's "Gold-Bug" will furnish the best example of a perfectly devised mystery plot. It will be seen at a glance that the secret of his success lies largely in fixing the attention of the reader on the gold-bug, which has only the most incidental relation to the real story. Confidence men make use of this principle in picking your pocket; but it is none the less a valuable and useful one. The mind is incapable of thinking of more than one thing at a time. If the attention is fixed on one thing, other things going on all around are overlooked and ignored.

In Poe's story what may be called the catastrophe, namely, the discovery of the treasure,

comes in the middle of the story, while the intellectual climax, or the revelation of the way in which the cipher was read, comes at the end. However, when we examine the whole plot carefully we see that Poe's only interest was in the method by which the cipher was read, and the incidents described serve only to create a profound interest in the reader as a preparation for a discussion of the cipher reading. An essay on cipher-reading would have been viewed with scorn; Poe's story of "The Gold-Bug" is classic.

The general method of constructing detective stories is simple—much simpler than it seems. The writer begins at the conclusion, and decides on what his detective is going to discover; then he goes backward, carefully arranging his signs. When all is in readiness he begins to write. His detective, with an air of mystery, is introduced and brought to the first sign. Of course, since it has been placed there for him to see, he sees it. After a thing is discovered, it is easy to assign many reasons why it should be as it is, and the imaginary detective has little difficulty in assigning many excellent reasons. So he goes on until he solves the prearranged mystery. Writing detective stories implies no special shrewdness or penetrative insight on the part of the writer. If confronted with a real mystery he would be as helpless as any one else.

Stockton in "The Lady or the Tiger?" creates a *very dramatic* situation simply by leading the way to two equally possible conclusions. There is

nothing in his story that presupposes the appearance at the door of the tiger any more than the appearance of the lady, or the lady any more than the tiger. The burden of solution is thrown wholly on the reader, and the reader will solve the problem in the way his own feelings dictate. The value and object of the story consist in thus compelling the reader to make a personal analysis of the whole situation, an operation in which he takes interest and which is worth his effort.

This concrete illustration suggests a universal principle in all dramatic construction: it is that drama, and indeed all literature, exists far more for the purpose of making the reader think for himself, than of teaching him by direct precept or example. No plot is successful which rouses no original thought on the part of the reader, and it is this original thought which really interests and amuses him. It is therefore a great mistake artistically and in every way to say too much. Yet enough must be said to enable the reader to do the rest. Evidently a profound knowledge of the mind of the reader, its powers, and capabilities, is quite as important in literary construction as direct knowledge of the subject-matter presented. Lack of that knowledge is the reason for the common failure of the scientific man when he tries to write; and the possession of it accounts for the success of the superficial writer, who knows little, but understands so well how to make that little count through his knowledge of the mind and characteristics of the reader.

Let us now consider the construction of an artistic play, like "Romeo and Juliet," which will aptly illustrate all forms of higher plot construction.

The prologue gives a brief outline of the plot before the dramatic action begins at all, so that the possibility of mystery is dispelled at once.

In the construction of the play itself, we observe first a universal principle: If the thought is high or involved, the mind of the reader must be prepared for it, and worked up to a proper degree of intensity of thought and feeling in order that the reader may be capable of understanding the deeper motives and subtler elements of the theme. In short, the reader or spectator must be induced to fix his attention fully upon the play. To give time for this, and to accomplish it, inferior characters are first introduced on the stage, and the way is gradually prepared for the more dramatic entrance of the principal or really important characters. In a play there can be no such thing as anti-climax: everything must tend upward, toward a point of more intense interest, at least until the sympathies of the reader have been obtained past his recall.

The play is divided into five acts, each act ending with a climax. The interval of rest between the acts, together with the change of subject, permit each succeeding act to begin on a more commonplace level, but one dramatically higher than *the preceding*, and the whole character of the act *should be more intense*, until the end of the third

act, when the reader's or spectator's interest in the plot development will carry him successfully to the conclusion.

In the first act of "Romeo and Juliet" we have a full presentation of the causes which lead to the catastrophe—the quarrel of the two houses of Montague and Capulet, and the love of Romeo for Juliet and Juliet for Romeo in the face of that deadly quarrel. The act ends with the revelation of this love.

The second act must necessarily show us the way in which the love develops. It is the love act of the play, including the famous balcony scene, and ending with the marriage of Romeo and Juliet. This phase of the subject is here fully presented and is an episode complete in itself.

But the basis of the dramatic conclusion or catastrophe lies in the quarrel of the two families, and in the third act we return directly to that, holding our breath to see how it will affect the fate of Romeo and Juliet. Clearly we must now see the heart of the plot, the motives which cause the catastrophe must be distinctly revealed. The first motive is presented in the first scene, in which Romeo kills Tybalt, as a result of which he is banished. But Romeo will not submit tamely. The second motive is found in the effort to compel Juliet to marry Paris. Clearly she cannot do it and remain an honest woman. The act ends with a positive declaration of her determination to resist, and the last words are, "If all else fail, myself have power to die." In that final word

the catastrophe is foreshadowed. With the help of the prologue we are now in possession of the whole plot, except the working out of the details.

The details become themselves highly dramatic in the fourth act, since the plan suggested by Friar Laurence results in the apparent death of Juliet. The act seems to end with an anti-climax in the jesting of the musicians and Peter. The fact is, however, that this levity suggests to the reader or spectator that the ruse has been successful, and he becomes accordingly interested in finding out how it can go wrong. His mind is too much tired out for great thoughts: he must be occupied with lesser ones which are yet sufficient to hold his attention fully.

The fifth act gives the catastrophe as briefly as possible.

A few observations on the construction of separate acts will suggest some essential principles.

First, the act should not be so long as to weary the reader too much. If it does, his capacity for thinking and being interested will be destroyed for the time being and he will lose most of the details until he has become rested. This principle accounts for the intervals between the acts. Moreover, the reader or spectator uses his brain a part at a time, so to speak, just as in physical exercise we use one set of muscles, and then another. Each act tires but one set of mental muscles, and the following act should as far as possible call into activity a fresh set. So the subjects of succeeding acts are as different as possible.

Second, still further to rest the spectator or reader, comic relief is introduced. It causes relaxation of the strain of attention. Pure tragedy would overstrain the mind. Likewise in a comedy, in which relaxation is the order throughout, more serious passages are introduced, for the purpose of relief and contrast.

Third, relief is secured throughout by variety in the characters, the dialogue, and the changing atmosphere of the play.

The whole purpose of the play is to rouse the feelings and sympathies, and then to suggest problems which will be food for thought on the part of those who have become interested.

It is obvious that poetic beauty in a tragedy will usually be found in fullest measure in the early part of the play,—that is, before the end of the third act, and preferably in the second act, since after the dramatic climax the mind of the auditor is too tired to grasp anything modestly beautiful. In a comedy the reverse is often the case, and we have some of our most beautiful poetry near the end of "The Merchant of Venice," since the mind is now aroused and is glad to be given subjects for more serious thought.

In order to produce climax and catastrophe, we must have two or more contending forces. Their collision produces intensity of interest in exactly the same way that the collision of two rocks produces fire. The resulting excitement or interest will depend on the force of the colliding characters. In tragedy the characters are in deadly

earnest, and the result is death, physical or mental, or at any rate revolution. Mere change of circumstances as the result of the collision constitutes what is popularly called "simple drama." When the collision produces happiness, the collision being easy and harmless, we have comedy. When the result is highly absurd, we have farce. In all there must be what is technically called "collision."

Evidently a drama consists in the action and reaction of various forces. These forces are human motives—a motive being that which causes motion. This subject will be more fully discussed in a separate chapter. Success in dramatic construction consists in securing a perfect balance of the various forces; and the more powerful the forces are, provided balance is secured, the greater is the dramatist.

CHAPTER V.

MOTIVE.

Every story is more or less a study of human motive. In a law court it is understood that a knowledge of the motive is necessary in order to establish a crime. This involves the conclusion that no human act can be rightly understood without the motive which led to it as well as the deed itself. In a story of mystery the motive, or original cause, is looked for, but proves veiled. A mystery story is valuable, however, in proportion to the investigation into the motive or com-

elling cause of the action. The word *motive* is commonly used of acts of human beings, but in a broader sense it may be used to designate the determining cause of any action.

In English it is used in a much more restricted sense than we have indicated here, and hence the French word *motif* has come into use in this connection to designate that wider significance of the English word when employed in the technical sense. The *motif* of a story is the idea, force, whatever it may be, which makes the action possible: it is the compelling force behind everything.

One of the great failings of young writers is that they do not seize the *motif* of a story at the start, and indeed they do not bring it out at all except by implication. The important element of every story is its *motif*, and this must be brought out clearly in the opening sentences, or within a page or two. Time, place, and circumstances must be indicated in some way first, with a little designation of the chief character. All this may be accomplished in a single word, at most in a sentence or two. Then the author should take hold of the *motif*, or the motive which makes the man act, or the force which brought about the catastrophe, whatever it was, and this must be clearly explained. There can be no vital interest in the story until it is explained. There are many ways of explaining it, or making it clear, among others the mere atmosphere of the language used. To illustrate, let us examine the *motif* of some typical stories.

A B C D E

"The Necklace" is a story about vanity, and this is indicated in the third paragraph, which begins, "She suffered ceaselessly, feeling herself born for all the delicacies and all the luxuries." In "A Piece of String" the first six paragraphs are introductory description, but in the seventh paragraph we have the peculiar actions of Maitre Hauchecorne when he picks up the piece of string, which gives a glimpse into his character in a way to show what element of his nature brought about the catastrophe.

In a story that is a miniature drama, like most of Maupassant's, the *motif* corresponds with the actuating motive of the chief character. But in stories of a descriptive nature we must look for the *motif* elsewhere. In Balzac's "A Passion in the Desert" the introductory paragraphs state that the story is to be an illustration of how animals are tamed, and the word "passion" in the title of the story, as well as a chance remark of the narrator that animals may be taught all the vices of civilization, make it clear at once that the *motif* of the story is the taming power of passion, or feeling, on an animal. In Dickens's "A Child's Dream of a Star," we find the *motif* in the second paragraph, which states clearly the fancy that nature—for instance, a star—sympathizes with the sorrows of man. This fancy, perhaps (and perhaps not) a figure of speech representing God's sympathy for man, becomes the determining force in the story. In the "Gold-Bug" we find the determining force which makes the story

to be contained in the cipher, which first comes to our attention as a scrap of paper, on which a death's head appears in place of a drawing illustrating a beetle. The desire to solve the mystery, both on the part of Legrand and of the reader, creates the interest.

But not only must every story and other work of literary art have its *motif*, but every act must have its motive clearly indicated. The writer should ceaselessly ask the question, Did this man or that woman have a sufficient motive for doing this or that deed?

When the would-be author considers that in order to write with genius he must so thoroughly understand human nature that he will know exactly what and how great a motive is necessary for every act of every person under any given circumstances, then the enormous requirements are clearly apparent. Even the best of writers fail constantly in this matter of understanding how much motive or how little corresponds to a given act, and they fail of the highest success just in proportion to that. But to succeed at all a writer must be constantly striving toward perfect knowledge.

For instance, it means nothing to give a description of how one man knocked another down unless the reason for his doing so is also clearly explained. To tell how a man met a woman on the street and kissed her is ridiculous unless some motive is given. More than this, the motive must be exactly proportioned to the act, and nicely cal-

culated for the nature. A person of reserve would have to be given a much stronger motive for any overt act than an unrestrained, impulsive person. Human nature works on just the same principles as physical nature: to drive a nail into hard wood requires more force than to drive it into soft wood, and when one attempts to drive a nail into a granite rock, the nail is bent or broken without entering at all. The skilled carpenter calculates with great precision just what blows are required, and he never tries to drive a nail where it will not go. The same skill and precision should be used by the writer when he tries to drive human souls: he must apply exactly the right amount of motive.

To determine this question of motive, a great deal of careful thinking is required, and this requirement is the reason why so much time is needed for the development in the author's own mind of the story which he gets first in the form of a plain narrative of facts. It is always necessary for him to think out all the motives. This involves thinking out with great precision the exact nature of the character, for motive must be perfectly proportioned to resistance, that is to character and also to circumstance. Training, education, atmosphere, personality, social conditions, are all elements in this matter of a nice adjustment of action and reaction, of motive and act, of *motif* and catastrophe.

CHAPTER VI.**WHAT MAKES A STORY WORTH TELLING.**

The editor of one of the large magazines recently remarked to the writer that the difficulty with the great mass of the stories sent him was not in lack of power to tell, but in the lack of something worth telling. The stories were nearly all well written commonplaces. The present time is peculiarly fitted to call out commonplace stories that are well written, rather than strong stories that are poorly written, as was the case half a century ago. Many of the stories actually printed in the magazines are so commonplace they are not worth telling, and are not materially better than hundreds that are rejected. They are usually written by persons who have before written stories with valuable ideas in them, stories well worth telling, and the editor in accepting the commonplace story by the same author assumes that if the author wrote one or more good stories, the present story must in some way be worth telling, and he admits it to the pages of his magazine without actually judging it as he judges all the stories of a beginner. But that he admits the commonplace compositions of a writer of reputation is certainly no reason why he should admit the commonplace compositions of a beginner, as many beginners seem to think. They say, "My story was just as good as that one: why didn't he accept mine as well as that one?" To be sure,

your story may have been just as good as that one by a well known writer, and still there may have been no reason why your story or his should ever have been written; and if his worthless story had the misfortune to be printed, it is no reason why you should not regard it as good fortune that your worthless story was not printed. We know it is rather a difficult philosophy to regard it as a piece of good fortune when you fail to get into print, but that is often the truth.

It is assumed that any one who aspires to learn the art of creative composition will have had a good English education, will be able to write grammatically, to punctuate, and to express himself with considerable freedom and fluency. If also he has mastered the principles of structure he will then be able to write sufficiently well to make his work acceptable as far as the form is concerned. In the present chapter we wish to consider what is necessary as to matter to make a literary undertaking worth doing.

In the first place, a writer must be in touch with the thought and feeling of the public at any given time. What was good work fifty years ago is not likely to be good now. It may have lasting elements, but those would be due to genius, a thing we are not now considering especially. To-day there is a certain list of topics which a large number of people are thinking about, and concerning which they wish information. On the side of these subjects they are especially susceptible. A story may be told merely to amuse and

not to give information; still the principle holds good, for, except in the directions that they are vitally interested, people are not sufficiently susceptible even to appreciate a good joke.

To start with, then, the young writer must be familiar with the topics of life that are uppermost in the public mind; still more, he must be in touch with the mood that is predominant. When the public is very serious, as it is when it has been stirred up about some great question of public policy, it wants a more or less serious story, and frivolity repels. On the other hand, when a reaction from its serious mood has come, a frivolous story pleases it most, and a serious one is an abomination. But each writer must realize all these things for himself. Stories of provincial life, studies of different parts of the country, have been much in fashion. But the keen observer will see the signs of the times and not insist on writing provincial stories when cosmopolitan ones are about to come chiefly into demand.

In a book of this nature we cannot undertake to put the inexperienced writer into touch with the public as it actually is. He must do that for himself. But if he would work effectively he must gain this touch, to some extent, at least. If what he writes is worth anything, it must help the public to think out the problems which are actually before it. Humorous light on the problem is just as valuable as any other, and at the back of amusement we nearly always find some

serious substance. So in whatever light you regard creative composition, the point of view from which success comes is the serious one of helping the public to think out some problem in which it is interested, or at least to throw light, whether red, green, or white, on the topics that are uppermost.

Lest the reader may take the statement of the case too seriously, let us give an illustration of a general kind. The public is always interested in love in some phase or other. But a love story which tells of a courtship after the old-fashioned, conventional, stiff manner, would be very dull indeed as compared with an artistic account of a modern affair of the heart.

What people like best is to know of something that falls in naturally with their own lives, and consciously or unconsciously helps them in a practical way to live. Unless it really touches their interests it counts for little. Simply to tell about something you know, however well you do it, is worth little unless your reader is also interested in it. If he knows all you have to tell him before he begins your story, he naturally finds it a bore. At the same time, if he does not know anything about it, he is likely not to care to know anything. What he wants is something that just fits his own case, or falls in with something he has been thinking about. If he has been thinking about old coins or dead men's bones, these subjects may form the basis of a story that will interest him, just as a story about a practical love

affair will interest him if he happens to have a love affair in hand himself.

If the writer wishes to interest the public (which is the meaning of success in writing), he writes about the things the public is interested in, and not only this, but he tells something fresh or suggestive about these topics or he holds his peace. If any writer can say any practical thing, in a story or out of it, that any considerable number of persons would be interested to know, he can safely write, and feel more or less sure that he will get into print. If he merely writes for the sake of writing, he does not deserve to get into print.

There are some persons who write largely for the public who have nothing whatever to say, but who have a clear way of saying nothing. A story may be beautiful for its style, which, however, means simply that there is something in the fresh way of saying the old thing which actually throws a glimmer of light on it. Also a story that has merely a situation which strikes the reader as new, different from any he has met before, may be worth printing. As a general thing the stories currently printed have only *one* point of real value, but a story to be worth anything must be out of the ordinary in at least one particular. A unique style, one that either stimulates, rasps, or charms may be the one thing; a new situation may be the one thing; a new character may be the one thing; a little bit of original philosophy of life may be the one thing.

But the author must know just what that one thing is, and bend all his energies to make it tell. To write a story and hope it may have one good point is not enough. The chances are a million to one against it. The writer must know enough of the reader to know what will interest or help or amuse him. This knowledge of the public and what it wants is the one great secret of successful writing. It is a fine and delicate knowledge, and has to be gained chiefly by experience and experiment. Publishers themselves understand it very little, for they can seldom tell how a new book will sell. Magazine editors know the kind of thing that has proved successful so far in their magazines, and confine themselves closely to what they know, not venturing very much on new things. The young writer who is to be successful must discover something new and useful by experimenting himself, and when he has found it he will keep close to his original line if he wishes to keep on succeeding. It is much like a miner striking a vein of valuable ore, whether gold, silver, or lead. He does not make any money until he has found his vein of ore, and then he knows he will not make much more unless he sticks to that vein till it is exhausted. Of course, every vein gives out in time, in story-writing as in mining. Then the author will have to give up writing or find a new vein, but he should not abandon his old vein until it is worked to the end.

It has been our observation that men most

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often take a good theme which they treat badly, and women a poor theme which they treat well. We do not know exactly how the experiment would work in practice, but it has always seemed a plausible plan to suppose that a man and a woman, if they sympathized with each other, could write a story together very much better than either could write alone. In such collaboration the man should make the plot, furnish the general philosophy of life, and work out the practical details of construction. In this sphere he should have full rein. Then the woman should write the story in her own way, since she is almost invariably superior in taste, delicacy, and truth of expression.

However this may be, it still remains that the great bulk of the unpublished work of women is excessively commonplace in subject, and the great bulk of the unpublished work of men is crude in expression. Women are, nevertheless, well adapted to writing short stories, but the one essential criticism that can be passed on the greater part of the unsuccessful attempts of women is that their work is hopelessly commonplace. There are women who have just the opposite fault, but they are few. That a tendency to be commonplace is a general fault of the sex we do not assert, though the fact that women doubtless have a narrower range than their brothers accounts for a part of it. A certain school has drilled it into the minds of all would-be writers that nothing is too trivial or commonplace to be made the

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story. There is some truth in this view, for if one can extract a new idea from the most trivial and commonplace incident Maupassant often does, he may be considered a genius. But there are very few indeed who are geniuses, and those who are not geniuses try to extract something out of the small and trivial and succeed in getting only the commonplace and trite. You should write of the slight and trivial by any means if you can say something fresh and helpful and new about it. But if there is nothing valuable in the situation with which you start for your story, remember that you must put along with your trivial incident something strong, fresh and useful out of your own powerful hold on life. The grains of sand about which Maupassant forms his pearls are often poor, slight things, but the wealth of thought and feeling and knowledge of life which he adds to his grain of sand in each case are simply luxuriant in abundance, and come from long, careful, painful observation of life; from personal experience of an unusual breadth. The young writer, before presenting his work to the publisher, should be very certain that he has something to say or give to the reader which the reader can enjoy or use, and he must understand just how the reader is going to enjoy or use it. Unless he can see this and understand it, he should not believe that he has any call to write stories. Moreover, it is not enough to know that the story when told orally has interested one. It is infinitely easier to interest by

than through writing; so unless the story when told has a sort of electric interest it is not worth writing. Some people, of course, cannot tell a story half as well as they can write it; but they can imagine the effect which would be produced if they could tell the story well in spoken words, and if when thus told they can see just how it would electrify the hearer with its interest, they may know it is a story worth writing. But unless a story will interest the hearer very unusually, one may be pretty certain it is not likely to interest the reader at all. Of course there is the possible interest excited by a written style; but a skillful style is acquired only by long, tedious practice, except in the very rarest instances, and one cannot fancy his style will count for anything until he has had some years of practical experience with writing that has actually been published. So after all there is no real exception to the general rule for the young writer, that he must have something new and fresh or useful to say to the reader.

CHAPTER VII

HOW TO OBSERVE MEN AND WOMEN.

Although the study of character has no bearing on literary art as art, it is a matter of great practical importance to the man or woman who would write: hence we may be pardoned a word as to the best method of studying character.

In going about observing men and women, it is indispensable that the student of human nature should classify, and the best method of classifying those you see is by comparison with friends you know well. You know a fine old gentleman, a lovely, unselfish woman, a selfish, disagreeable woman, etc. You have an ideal of childhood, of intellectuality, of stupidity, incarnate in some one you know. Take that person as in a way a type, and place him at the head of your classification. Then observe how often you find his leading characteristic in the thousands of others you may come in contact with in a year. This method of comparison leads you to separate characteristics from individuals, so that you can think of them as entities, as real, substantial things, though at first they seemed inseparable from the person in whom you had seen them. Not until you have seen the same characteristics in a great many persons do you come to know practically what a type is.

In all literary work the special and queer in human nature ought to be eliminated; for if you picture types, your characters should be essentially like a great many other men and women in the world. When you have looked at but one person you cannot be sure how much is peculiar to him alone and how much is broad human nature. In order to know what is broadly human you must have observed a great many.

But you may ask, When and where can one *best* observe human nature? The answer is, At

all times and under all circumstances. Watch the faces you meet in the street until you come to know just what the character of a stranger is by your first glance at his face, figure and general manner. Study the meaning of eyes, of voice, of gesture, as well as the meaning of the lines of the face. Short persons have certain qualities, tall persons certain others. Height, weight, color, correspond to an almost infinite number of mental characteristics. Do not leave these broad and obvious things out of sight in observing smaller and finer shades of character.

The chief mistake that the careful student of life makes is in becoming so absorbed in the very small and fine in character that he forgets all about the broad and obvious. It is much better to know well the broad and obvious than the fine and delicate, for if one is a shrewd observer of the larger things, he will be quite likely not to err in the smaller; but the reverse is not true.

The next step is in the study of human passions, and that observation must begin with one's own heart if one can be honest with one's self. How do your moods come and go? How does anger or joy or eagerness affect you? If you look carefully you will find yourself doing a thousand little things you were never before conscious of, and it is these little unconscious things which indicate the inward condition. To say that your heroine was proud and defiant is not half so effective as saying she tossed her head and stamped her foot, and her eyes flashed defiance.

A gesture, a glance, anything however small which one does unconsciously under stress, is significant and telling.

What people tell you about themselves is seldom to be taken seriously. No doubt they try to be honest, and no doubt they think they understand themselves: but the opinion of a man about one he has just met is infinitely more likely to be true than anything he may say about himself.

This suggests another point: it is difficult to analyse the character of an intimate friend. Look for real information as to human character in the first vivid impressions you receive from one you have never met before. The salient characteristics stand out then: those of your friend have been blunted in your mind by association and involved in a great confusion and complication, while in the case of a stranger you do not know too much to understand clearly. In writing it is seldom safe to write about things you know very well, because your store of information is so great it is difficult to choose from it. If you have a few vivid impressions they are more easily and satisfactorily handled in a story.

It is a trick of observers of life to see in others their own peculiar defects. This does not come from vanity, but is a sort of curious optical illusion or delusion, and we mention it here simply to impress the student with the fact that every observation to be valuable has to be corrected, so to speak; it must be examined to find out *how much of the original impression was personal to*

the observer and how much really was true. There is always a small amount of what may be called prejudice in every impression, however clear-minded and fair one may be, and when one comes to write, this personal element shows itself disastrously unless one is very much on one's guard.

Every writer ought to formulate for himself more or less completely a philosophy of life. He should arrange his thought about the universe into a system, so that he will have an opinion as to what God is, what love is, what the meaning of life is, what is to be looked into and known and what is to be left untouched by the human mind. The systematizing of all life may be very incomplete and impractical for any one but the particular owner of it; yet every writer ought to have a clear notion of just what he thinks about these things, in order to be perfectly steady in his delineation of motive. This philosophy of life will not be found in books or anywhere else outside of one's own mind. Each man must study it out for himself, but until he has come to some conclusion he is likely to have difficulty whenever he finds his characters in certain situations he has not fully considered. Just what the philosophy is, matters much less than that one should have a very definite notion of what it is in his particular case.

The most important point about successful character study, however, is patience. It cannot be forced, and it frequently works itself out in

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the mind unconsciously. Certain impressions will lodge in your mind when you have seen some person, and not until weeks afterward will their presence be discovered. One cannot make a business of searching out these hidden things, for a search seldom reveals anything; but the natural processes of the desirous mind rarely leave anything hidden for ever. This is the reason why no man ought to make writing his sole business, at least until he is well advanced in the art. One gets observations in the ordinary course of everyday life, and the more unconscious one is, the more likely is he to get valuable impressions. A story grows in one's mind, too, far better when one's hands are engaged or one's mind is occupied in other directions. During the intervals of rest from business the mind takes up the realization of the character with freshness and eagerness. If the mind works on character study more than a very short time, it grows weary and nothing valuable can be accomplished.

One always gets the best opportunities for studying character in the ordinary routine of some steady employment, whether it be that of a clerk in his office or a woman in her social obligations. It is best to choose an employment, of course, in which one comes in contact with as many different people as possible, and it is also necessary to cultivate habits of sociability and sympathy with *those about you* if you are to draw out their real

characters. Sympathy, sincerity and honest eagerness are the very best tools one can have to open the treasure chests which contain the secrets of human life.

CHAPTER VIII.**THE TEST OF ABILITY.**

Two elements are needed for success in authorship: the chief is a thorough knowledge of the art of expression; the second, only less important, is an original talent, or sufficient personal qualifications. Many people will wonder why talent is put second and not first, for there is a popular impression that talent is pretty nearly everything. An old professor who was very wise and indeed very well known all the world over, used to say to his class that each one had mental power enough to create a revolution, though he were the dullest man of them all; and he would illustrate his proposition by saying that any man could learn by constant daily practice during a sufficient period to hold his body straight out at arms' length at right angles as he grasped one of the rungs of a ladder. Likewise, there are very few indeed who do not have some ideas worth expressing, if by sufficient study of the art they have learned to do it with force and effect.

It is always a question, however, how much work will be needed to accomplish the desired result, and the length of time that is needed, as well as the amount of effort, depends directly on

one's natural ability. It becomes a very important problem to test one's ability, to know just what it is, and whether it is worth developing in comparison with certain other talents. One should not waste time in learning to write if he can learn how to be a merchant easily and surely, and with greater success. It is the purpose of this chapter to offer a few suggestions of a purely practical kind looking in this direction.

First, let us say that no one, whatever his talent, should think of making his living by writing pure literature, that is by fiction, poetry, or essays. Most have not the talent to succeed to the extent that this requires, and those who have the talent are very likely to spoil it by putting such an enormous burden on their shoulders. Whatever may be said to the contrary, those who seek a literary life, even of the highest kind, will find it decidedly to their advantage to enter journalism, or take up some editorial work, or otherwise undertake the business side of literature before trying to enter the ideal side. Many will find that literature is best pursued as a side issue with some other business. There is no reason why journalism or editorial work or law should seriously interfere with success in creative writing: on the contrary, there is every reason in the world why, in the end, some such outside pursuit should aid very substantially one's success in pure literature, because such occupations *open up the avenues* by which we come to understand *human nature*, to realize life truly; or in other

words, these other pursuits enable us to accumulate in the best possible way the material we must use in making literature. The man (or woman) who devotes himself exclusively to literature is almost sure to become more or less morbid, and we venture to assert that the successful novelist of to-day who lives by his pen has (though he may tell you quite the contrary himself) a constant fight against morbidity, and one in which he is not always successful.

But having decided to devote a certain amount of one's time to writing of some sort, in most cases fiction, the young writer wishes to test his ability in some way. The simplest method is to go with one's work to a wise and sympathetic adviser, if you can find such a one, and let him tell you just what your strong points are and just what are your weak ones. With this knowledge you can easily make up your mind as to the amount of time necessary to cure your defects, and whether your gifts warrant the effort.

But a wise and sympathetic adviser is the rarest thing in the world to find. There are plenty of advisers, but most of them know still less about you than you know about yourself, and in addition they, for one reason or another, will not or cannot tell you what they know. As a matter of fact you must usually be your own adviser.

In order to test one's-self one must be honest, and what is more, sincerity is the first qualification for the writing of anything really valuable. The public loves sincerity; and for the sake of

sincerity will forgive almost any artistic defect.

Sincerity means truth of heart, both in reality and in portrayal, and good literature is that which represents the heart truly.

The first great gift which the young author should covet is, then, sincerity, and for two reasons: first, it is one great talent (yes, a real *talent*, perhaps *genius*); second, it is an absolute requisite for testing one's abilities.

Many will doubtless pass over this hastily, but the truth still remains that it is the first and chief qualification for success in writing, and few are they who possess it in any marked degree.

The second qualification, the qualification which the man or woman who really sets out honestly to examine himself will look for, is the ability to follow a train of thought without outside aids. Many people can talk well, even brilliantly; but when alone they will not be able to think continuously or effectively. Some people would call this power imagination, but the ability to think in images is not necessarily requisite to writing successfully. The writer who would succeed must have the habit of thinking, however, and people who do not like to meditate, whether in a dreamy and far-away fashion, or in a purely practical and business-like fashion, will not be likely to write with any considerable power. Letter-writing as a gift usually goes with the ability to think, but sometimes those who do not like to write letters have a literary ability.

The third requisite for becoming a successful

writer is the gift of language. We have mentioned this last of all because it is really the least important, strange as this may seem. Language can be acquired, but sincerity and meditateness are very difficult of acquisition. We know a young man who until he was twenty appeared to lack the gift of language almost entirely, and thought this a fatal impediment to his becoming a successful writer. He set himself to acquire what command of words he could, however, and in the end became eminently proficient. Of course some people gain a command of language much more easily than others; but all must learn, and the brightest and dullest alike have the task of acquisition to be accomplished before they can be proficient.

To test one's command of language, one may first inquire whether one is a ready letter-writer or not. This is a vague test, for some people write voluminous letters who have not large command of language, and some people who have a command of language never write long letters. Yet these are exceptions to the rule that if one is a ready letter-writer one has a good command of language, and if one is not, that command is probably lacking as a natural gift. Letter-writing, however, does not indicate in any way one's acquired proficiency in the use of language, which comes only from long and thoughtful reading. If one has not done a very large amount of careful, thoughtful reading of the best literature he is not likely to have a trained style, however voluminously he may have written.

Verse-making is an admirable way of cultivating one's use of words, for it necessitates a great variety of expressive phrases as well as individual words for rhyming and so forth, and is strongly recommended for practice and as a test.

Another good test of one's command of language, and also a good exercise, is to sit down quietly and alone after some interesting experience or observation and write out a description of it. If one is really interested in the subject, the writing should be easy and expressive. Never try to write a description of anything which does not interest you, however, for unless you have a genuine interest there will be no test. A description of a conversation is a good test of one's power to write dialogue.

Having sincerity, the meditative habit, and a good command of language, one ought to be able to write in some way or other with real success. It is still an open question, however, what style of writing one should choose.

The simplest form of composition is essay-writing, and it is a fact that nearly all great novelists, and indeed prose writers of all kinds, have begun with essay-writing—for instance, writing book reviews for a local newspaper, or short articles describing some curious or interesting event, or little studies of interesting personalities. This is not essay-writing in the technical sense of the word: it is perhaps more accurately *termed* sketching in words. The artist begins to *make* outlines first, then draws careful pictures in

black and white, and finally paints an elaborate picture in colors.

When one has mastered sketch-writing (and no young author should think for a moment of leaping at once into the finished work, though almost all do just this) he will wish to find out whether he has the ability to write an artistic story. To ascertain this, let him ask first whether he understands the meaning of human motive, for fiction is a study of motive. If he has a deep and decided interest in human motive, he may probably become a writer of short stories or artistic fiction of some kind. Stories may be written in an essay style or the conversational style, and one should next determine one's powers in this particular. People with vivid imaginations will write character studies well, those with a philosophic turn of mind will write stories in the narrative, descriptive, essay style, but in any case a story ought to be a study of motive.

The style that one can write most easily is the best style to cultivate. Many people think that what they do well and naturally and easily is a fault rather than otherwise. This is not the case, however, and if one has a particular facility for conversation, or character study, or philosophic writing, he should cultivate it, restraining it when it becomes excessive and burdensome to be sure, but never giving it up as altogether bad. It is much better to learn to curb one's natural tendencies than to create new abilities.

The secret of arriving at a satisfactory knowl-

edge of one's abilities is to begin at a definite point and proceed from point to point. Ask first if you are quite honest with yourself; then follow in order with the other questions we have proposed, making tests of various kinds until you are satisfied in your own mind. Study each point thoroughly, in order to find out whether you surely lack or surely possess a gift, and then consider whether you can by study and effort develop the lacking quality, or had best pursue some line in which it is not required. This habit of self-examination will not only give you trustworthy and necessary information about yourself; but it will develop that habit of mental investigation which is at the foundation of all valuable character study.

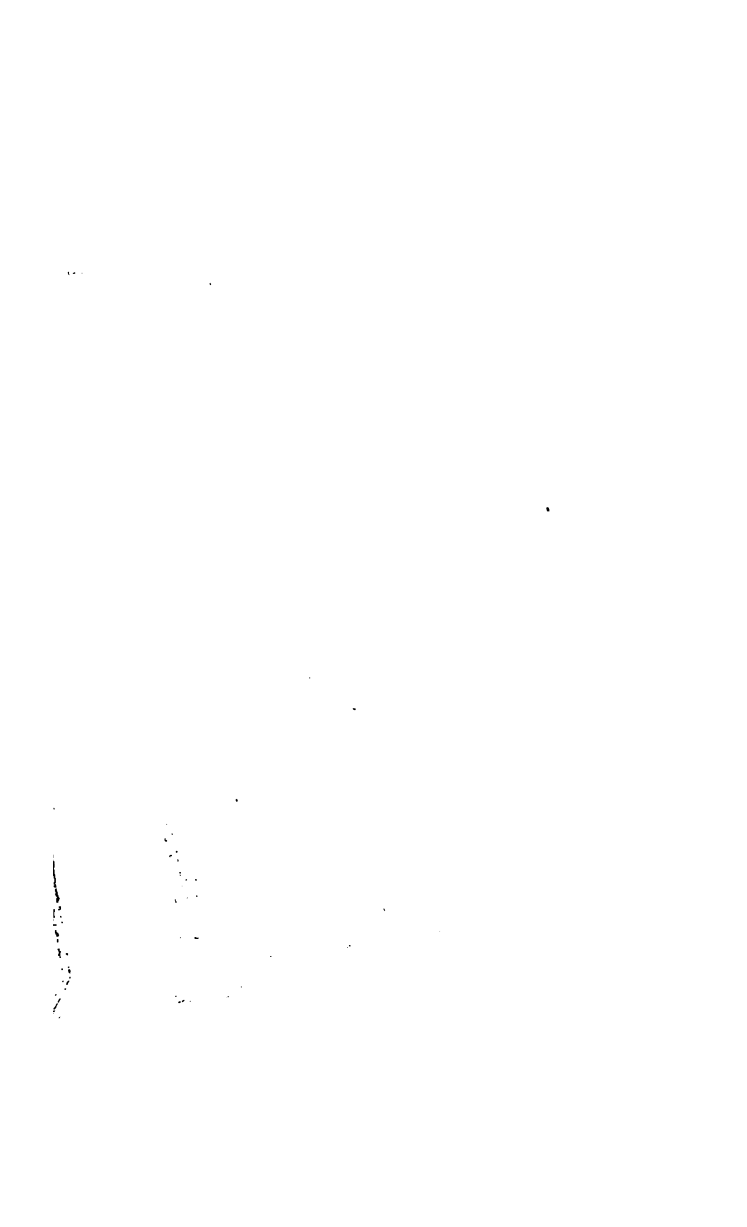
CHAPTER IX.

CONCLUSION.

But the rules of art must be forgotten before art can prove effective. There are two perfect artists, the innocent and unconscious child (who is but the hand of divine intelligence), and the trained man of letters to whom art has become a second nature. Art is after all but a means. It should be the fluid medium through which heart speaks to heart. Literature is for the heart to live by—if you would know its end and mission. If you would make others live, you must live yourself—yes, and die. You must coin your *heart's blood* into the universal coin of the realm.

of heart, so transmuting your pain into life for others. If you do that, art becomes but a paltry thing in comparison—indeed, it is only the *way* in which you perform your alchemy. *Art is a means, never an end*, and “Art for art’s sake,” or “*L’Art pour l’art*,” as they call it more appropriately, is dilettanteism pure and simple. Dilettanteism may be a very good thing on occasion, but it is not for the dilettante that the practical instructions of this little book have been intended.

Rules may be applied to a subject before it is understood or mastered in order to get at the heart of the matter; and they may be applied to a work of art after it is finished in order to test it and discover how to correct it. But while one is constructing, while one is actually writing, rules are the most fatal thing to have in mind. This fact has no doubt been the great barrier to the existence of any formulation of the principles of literary art by actual literary artists. But though the athlete must not think of dumb-bells and horizontal bars and his trainer when he is performing feats of dexterity on the trapeze a hundred feet above the ground, it would be utterly fatal for him to attempt anything dangerous or difficult without having first gone through all this conscious, painful training. Likewise with the literary artist: self-consciousness during the actual performance of the feat of writing is the most dangerous thing in the world; but there is no surer way of escaping it than by submitting first to a rigorous course of self-conscious preparation.



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